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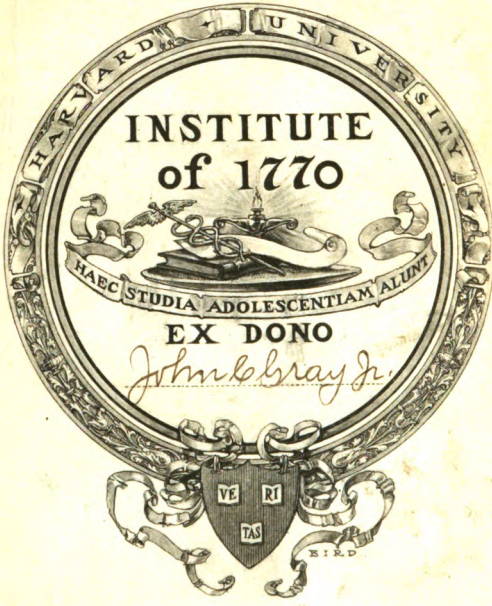


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THE  
LIFE AND WORKS  
OF  
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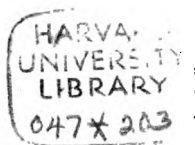
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LIFE AND WORKS  
OF  
ROBERT BURNS.

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ELLISLAND.

JUNE 1788—DECEMBER 1791—(CONTINUED.)

AMONG the gentlemen of Nithsdale by whom Burns had been kindly received was Mr M'Murdo, chamberlain to the Duke of Queensberry. This gentleman, with a fine young family, which included some blooming daughters, resided in the ducal mansion of Drumlanrig, a few miles from the poet's farm; and he had there entertained our bard with the most distinguished kindness.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.

ELLISLAND, 24<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1789.

SIR—A poet and a beggar are in so many points of view alike, that one might take them for the same individual character under different designations; were it not that, though, with a trifling poetic licence, poets may be styled beggars, yet the converse of the proposition does not hold, that every beggar is a poet. In one particular, however, they remarkably agree; if you help either the one or the other to a mug of ale or the picking of a bone, they will very willingly repay you with a song. This occurs to me at present (as I have just despatched a well-lined rib of J. Kilpatrick's Highlander;<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kilpatrick was the name of a neighbouring blacksmith. Burns alludes to a piece of Highland mutton, which somehow may have been obtained through the medium of Mr M'Murdo from this personage.

a bargain for which I am indebted to you), in the style of our ballad-printers, 'Five Excellent New Songs.' The enclosed is nearly my newest song, and one that has cost me some pains, though that is but an equivocal mark of its excellence. Two or three others which I have by me shall do themselves the honour to wait on your after-leisure: petitioners for admittance into favour must not harass the condescension of their benefactor.

You see, sir, what it is to patronise a poet. 'Tis like being a magistrate in Pettyborough; you do them the favour to preside in their council for one year, and your name bears the prefatory stigma of bailie for life.

With not the compliments, but the best wishes, the sincerest prayers of the season for you, that you may see many happy years with Mrs M'Murdo and your family—two blessings, by the by, to which your rank does not entitle you—a loving wife and fine family being almost the only good things of this life to which the farmhouse and cottage have an exclusive right—I have the honour to be, sir, your much indebted and very humble servant,

R. BURNS.<sup>1</sup>

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TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

ELLISLAND, 20th Jan. 1789.

SIR—The enclosed sealed packet I sent to Edinburgh a few days after I had the happiness of meeting you in Ayrshire, but you were gone for the continent. I have now added a few more of my productions, those for which I am indebted to the Nithsdale Muse. The piece inscribed to R. G. Esq. is a copy of verses I sent Mr Graham of Fintry, accompanying a request for his assistance in a matter to me of very great moment. To that gentleman I am already doubly indebted for deeds of kindness of serious import to my dearest interests, done in a manner grateful to the delicate feelings of sensibility. This poem is a species of composition new to me; but I do not intend it shall be my last essay of the kind, as you will see by the *Poet's Progress*. These fragments, if my design succeed, are but a small part of the intended whole. I propose it shall be the work of my utmost exertions, ripened by years: of course I do not wish it much known. The fragment beginning 'A little, upright, pert, tart,' &c. I have not shewn to man living, till I now send it you. It forms the postulata, the axioms, the definition of a character, which, if it appear at all, shall be placed in a variety of lights. This particular part I send you merely as a sample of my hand at portrait-sketching; but, lest idle conjecture should pretend to point out the original, please to let it be for your single, sole inspection.

Need I make any apology for this trouble to a gentleman who has treated me with such marked benevolence and peculiar kindness;

<sup>1</sup> The original of this letter is in possession of Mr John Gibson, post-master, Whitehaven.

who has entered into my interests with so much zeal, and on whose critical decisions I can so fully depend! A poet as I am by trade, these decisions are to me of the last consequence. My late transient acquaintance among some of the mere rank and file of greatness, I resign with ease; but to the distinguished champions of genius and learning, I shall be ever ambitious of being known. The native genius and accurate discernment in Mr Stewart's critical strictures; the justice (iron justice, for he has no jewels of compassion for a poor poetic sinner) of Dr Gregory's remarks, and the delicacy of Professor Dalzell's taste,<sup>1</sup> I shall ever revere.

I shall be in Edinburgh some time next month. I have the honour to be, sir, your highly obliged and very humble servant, R. B.

We learn from the above letter to Mr Stewart, that he meditated a laborious poem, to be entitled *The Poet's Progress*, probably of an autobiographical nature. He enclosed various short pieces designed to form part of this poem, but none have been preserved except the following:<sup>2</sup>—

#### A SKETCH.

A little, upright, pert, tart, tripping wight,  
And still his precious self his dear delight;  
Who loves his own smart shadow in the streets,  
Better than e'er the fairest she he meets.  
A man of fashion too, he made his tour,  
Learned *vive la bagatelle, et vive l'amour*;  
So travelled-monkeys their grimace improve,  
Polish their grin, nay, sigh for ladies' love.  
Much specious lore, but little understood;  
Veneering oft outshines the solid wood:  
His solid sense—by inches you must tell,  
But mete his cunning by the old Scotch ell;  
His meddling vanity, a busy fiend,  
Still making work his selfish craft must mend.

It is painful to come to the conclusion, from a remark and quotation in a subsequent letter, that this selfish, superficial wight was—Creech—the same 'Willie' whom he described in such affectionate terms in May 1787, and to whom he then wished 'a pow as auld's Methuselah.' The dallyings of the witty bibliopole over his accounts, his keen tenacity towards his own interests in every transaction, and the essential stinginess which lurked under a complaisant manner, had combined to disgust Burns

<sup>1</sup> Dalzell was professor of Greek in the Edinburgh University.

<sup>2</sup> It is not unlikely that the lines on William Smellie, already introduced, were intended to form a part of *The Poet's Progress*.



entirely with one whom he originally looked upon as a kind patron, and a man of agreeable talents and character. I could not pretend to say to what extent there was any solid justification of the antipathy of Burns, or even to what extent our poet was prepared for a serious and open avowal of such opinions regarding his publisher. It will be seen that on a second settlement of accounts in February, Burns was satisfied with the measure of justice extended to him by the bookseller; and in May he addressed him a civil letter. Afterwards he resumed his expressions of disgust and antipathy, but again became reconciled; and this state of things existed at the time of his death. On the whole, it is probable that Creech acted too much according to his wonted instincts towards Burns, although with such a show of fairness as occasionally disarmed the poet of his resentment. If some of his old associates in the literary trade are to be credited, it was not in his nature to have treated Burns with justice. On the other hand, Dr Currie seems to have been convinced that there was no cause to blame the publisher. He says, in a letter to Messrs Cadell and Davies, Dec. 30, 1797: 'It is true there was a difference between our high-souled poet and Mr Creech, and some of Burns's friends have a notion that Mr Creech did not use him liberally. For my own part, I have found the correspondence among Burns's papers, and I can see no proof of any ill-usage. The bard indulged occasionally in sarcasms against men of character; yet I can discover that his deliberate opinions were the result of a judgment profound and nearly unbiassed, and differing much from the effusions of his sensibility. Among the Edinburgh characters drawn by him, I think I can discover that of our friend Creech (for the names are not given at length in his diary), and if I do not deceive myself, it is a capital likeness, and on the whole favourable.'<sup>1</sup> I have heard that the letters of Burns to Creech—many of them bearing intemperate charges and insinuations against the publisher—were finally submitted to Mrs Hay (Margaret Chalmers), who exerted her influence to have them destroyed; which was done. Dr Currie, a few days after the above date, wrote to the same gentlemen—'Mr Creech informs me that whatever little difference subsisted between Burns and him had been made up long before the bard's death, and that he shall do everything in his power to serve the family.'

<sup>1</sup> Manuscripts in possession of Joseph Mayer, Esq., Liverpool. We must differ with Dr Currie as to the favourableness of the sketch.

TO ———.

ELLISLAND, 22d January 1789.<sup>1</sup>

SIR—There are two things which, I believe, the blow that terminates my existence alone can destroy—my attachment and propensity to poesy, and my sense of what I owe to your goodness. There is nothing in the different situations of a Great and a Little man that vexes me more than the ease with which the one practises some virtues that to the other are extremely difficult, or perhaps wholly impracticable. A man of consequence and fashion shall richly repay a deed of kindness with a nod and a smile, or a hearty shake of the hand; while a poor fellow labours under a sense of gratitude, which, like copper coin, though it loads the bearer, is yet of small account in the currency and commerce of the world. As I have the honour, sir, to stand in the poor fellow's predicament with respect to you, will you accept of a device I have thought on to acknowledge these obligations I can never cancel? Mankind in general agree in testifying their devotion, their gratitude, their friendship, or their love, by presenting whatever they hold dearest. Everybody who is in the least acquainted with the character of a Poet, knows that there is nothing in the world on which he sets so much [*value as his verses*. *I have resolved, sir, from time*<sup>2</sup>] to time, as she may bestow her favours, to present you with the productions of my humble Muse. The enclosed are the principal of her works on the banks of the Nith. The Poem inscribed to R. G. Esq. is some verses, accompanying a request, which I sent to Mr Graham of Fintry—a gentleman who has given double value to some important favours he has bestowed on me by his manner of doing them, and on whose future patronage likewise I must depend for matters to me of the last consequence.

I have no great faith in the boasted pretensions to intuitive propriety and unlaboured elegance. The rough material of Fine Writing is certainly the gift of Genius; but I as firmly believe that the workmanship is the united effort of Pains, Attention, and Repeated-trial. The piece addressed to Mr Graham is my first essay in that didactic, epistolary way; which circumstance I hope will bespeak your indulgence. To your friend Captain Erskine's strictures I lay claim as a relation; not, indeed, that I have the honour to be akin to the peerage, but because he is a son of Parnassus.<sup>3</sup>

I intend being in Edinburgh in four or five weeks, when I shall certainly do myself the honour of waiting on you, to testify with what respect and gratitude, &c.

This letter appears to have been addressed to some Edinburgh

<sup>1</sup> Misdated in the original 1788.

<sup>2</sup> Supplied on conjecture, to make up a blank in the original.

<sup>3</sup> Allusion is here made to Captain Andrew Erskine, brother to the Earl of Kelly, a poet and musical amateur residing in Edinburgh.

friend of the upper class. Though written with evident effort—even the handwriting having a laboured air—it contains some striking expressions, and is valuable for a repetition of the poet's just and sound opinion on what is necessary to excellence in literary composition.

On returning a newspaper which Captain Riddel had sent to him for his perusal, containing some strictures on his poetry, Burns added a note in impromptu verse, exhibiting that wonderful facility of diction which he possessed even under the greatest rhyming-difficulties:—

EXTEMPORE TO CAPTAIN RIDDEL,

ON RETURNING A NEWSPAPER.

ELLISLAND, *Monday Evening.*

Your news and review, sir, I've read through and through, sir,  
With little admiring or blaming;  
The papers are barren of home-news or foreign,  
No murders or rapes worth the naming.

Our friends, the reviewers, those chippers and hewers,  
Are judges of mortar and stone, sir;  
But of *meet* or *unmeet*, in a *fabric complete*,  
I'll boldly pronounce they are none, sir.

My goose-quill too rude is to tell all your goodness  
Bestowed on your servant the poet;  
Would to God I had one like a beam of the sun,  
And then all the world, sir, should know it!

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TO CAPTAIN RIDDEL.

ELLISLAND, 1789.

SIR—I wish from my inmost soul it were in my power to give you a more substantial gratification and return for all the goodness to the poet, than transcribing a few of his idle rhymes. However, 'an old song,' though to a proverb an instance of insignificance, is generally the only coin a poet has to pay with.

If my poems which I have transcribed, and mean still to transcribe, into your book, were equal to the grateful respect and high esteem I bear for the gentleman to whom I present them, they would be the finest poems in the language. As they are, they will at least be a testimony with what sincerity I have the honour to be, sir, your devoted humble servant,

R. B.

The irritable genius of Burns led him often to view persons and

things very much as they affected himself. The same lord, gentleman, or lady, who, receiving him with urbanity, became the theme of his kindest feelings, might have come in for the eternal stigma of his satire, if, by a slight change of circumstances, he or she had been a cause of personal annoyance to him, or awakened his jealous apprehensions regarding his own dignity. In the course of the present month, an example of this infirmity of temper occurs. Let himself be the recorder of the incident, it being premised that the lady whom he thus holds up to execration was one fairly liable to no such censure :—

‘ In January last, on my road to Ayrshire, I had to put up at Bailie Whigham’s in Sanquhar, the only tolerable inn in the place. The frost was keen, and the grim evening and howling wind were ushering in a night of snow and drift. My horse and I were both much fatigued with the labours of the day ; and just as my friend the bailie and I were bidding defiance to the storm, over a smoking bowl, in wheels the funeral pageantry of the late Mrs Oswald,<sup>1</sup> and poor I am forced to brave all the terrors of the tempestuous night, and jade my horse—my young favourite horse, whom I had just christened Pegasus—farther on through the wildest hills and moors of Ayrshire to the next inn ! The powers of poetry and prose sink under me when I would describe what I felt. Suffice it to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the enclosed ode.’

## ODE,

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF MRS OSWALD.

Dweller in yon dungeon dark,  
Hangman of creation, mark !  
Who in widow-weeds appears,  
Laden with unhonoured years,  
Noosing with care a bursting purse,  
Baited with many a deadly curse !

## STROPHE.

View the withered beldam’s face—  
Can thy keen inspection trace  
Aught of humanity’s sweet melting grace ?  
Note that eye, ’tis rheum o’erflows,  
Pity’s flood there never rose.  
See these hands, ne’er stretched to save,  
Hands that took—but never gave.

<sup>1</sup> Dec. 6, 1788, died, at her house in Great George Street, Westminster, Mrs Oswald, widow of Richard Oswald, Esq., of Auchincruive — *Magazine Obituary*.

Keeper of Mammon's iron chest,  
Lo, there she goes, unpitied and unblest  
She goes, but not to realms of everlasting rest!

#### ANTISTROPHE.

Plunderer of armies, lift thine eyes  
(Awhile forbear, ye tort'ring fiends);  
Seest thou whose step, unwilling, hither bends?  
No fallen angel, hurled from upper skies;  
'Tis thy trusty quondam mate,  
Doomed to share thy fiery fate,  
She, tardy, hell-ward plies.

#### EPODE.

And are they of no more avail,  
Ten thousand glittering pounds a year?  
In other words, can Mammon fail,  
Omnipotent as he is here?  
O bitter mockery of the pompous bier,  
While down the wretched vital part is driv'n!  
The cave-lodged beggar, with a conscience clear,  
Expires in rags, unknown, and goes to heav'n.

There is a pleasanter memorial of one of his Ayrshire journeys. To quote a narrative first presented by Allan Cunningham—'He had arrived at Wanlockhead on a winter day, when the roads were slippery with ice, and Jenny Geddes or Peg Nicolson [more likely, Pegasus] kept her feet with difficulty. The blacksmith of the place was busied with other pressing matters in the forge, and could not spare time for *frosting* the shoes of the poet's mare; and it is likely he would have proceeded on his dangerous journey, had he not bethought himself of propitiating the son of Vulcan with verse. He called for pen and ink, and wrote these verses to John Taylor, a person of influence in Wanlockhead:—

#### TO JOHN TAYLOR.

With Pegasus upon a day,  
Apollo weary flying,  
Through frosty hills the journey lay,  
On foot the way was plying.

Poor slip-shod giddy Pegasus  
Was but a sorry walker;  
To Vulcan, then Apollo goes,  
To get a frosty calker.

Obliging Vulcan fell to work,  
Threw by his coat and bonnet,  
And did Sol's business in a crack;  
Sol paid him with a sonnet.

Ye Vulcan's sons of Wanlockhead,  
Pity my sad disaster;  
My Pegasus is poorly shod—  
I'll pay you like my master.

RAMAGE'S, 3 o'clock.

'When he had done, a gentleman of the name of Sloan, who accompanied him, endorsed the note in prose in these words:—"J. Sloan's best compliments to Mr Taylor, and it would be doing him and the Ayrshire Bard a particular favour if he would oblige them *instantly* with his agreeable company. The road has been so slippery, that the riders and the brutes were equally in danger of getting some of their bones broken. For the Peet, his life and limbs are of some consequence to the world; but for poor Sloan it matters very little what may become of him. The whole of this business is to ask the favour of getting the horses' shoes sharpened." On the receipt of this, Taylor spoke to the smith, and the smith flew to his tools, and sharpened the horses' shoes. It is recorded that *Burnevin* lived thirty years to say "he had never been weel paid but ance, and that was by a poet, who paid him in money, paid him in drink, and paid him in verse."

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TO BISHOP GEDDES.<sup>1</sup>

ELLISLAND, 2d Feb. 1789.

VENERABLE FATHER—As I am conscious that, wherever I am, you do me the honour to interest yourself in my welfare, it gives me pleasure to inform you that I am here at last, stationary in the serious business of life, and have now not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination, to attend to those great and important questions—what I am, where I am, and for what I am destined.

In that first concern, the conduct of the man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blameable, and there I have

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Geddes, born at Arradowl, in Banffshire, in 1737, was reared as a Catholic clergyman, and long officiated in that capacity in his native county and elsewhere. As humbly born as Burns, he possessed much of his strong and eccentric genius; and it is not surprising that he and the Ayrshire Bard should have become friends. After 1780 his life was spent in London, chiefly under the fostering patronage of a generous Catholic nobleman, Lord Petre. The heterodox opinions of Dr Geddes, his extraordinary attempts to translate the Bible, and his numerous fugitive publications on controversial divinity, made much noise at the time; but he is now only remembered for some successful Scotch verses. This singular man died in London, February 30, 1806, in the sixty-fifth year of his age.

secured myself in the way pointed out by nature and nature's God. I was sensible that, to so helpless a creature as a poor poet, a wife and family were encumbrances, which a species of prudence would bid him shun; but when the alternative was, being at eternal warfare with myself, on account of habitual follies, to give them no worse name, which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity, would to me ever justify, I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice. Besides, I had in my 'Jean' a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands; and who could trifle with such a deposit?

In the affair of a livelihood, I think myself tolerably secure: I have good hopes of my farm; but should they fail, I have an Excise-commission, which, on my simple petition, will at any time procure me bread. There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an Excise-officer, but I do not pretend to borrow honour from my profession; and though the salary be comparatively small, it is luxury to anything that the first twenty-five years of my life taught me to expect.

Thus, with a rational aim and method in life, you may easily guess, my reverend and much-honoured friend, that my characteristical trade is not forgotten. I am, if possible, more than ever an enthusiast to the Muses. I am determined to study man and nature, and in that view incessantly; and to try if the ripening and corrections of years can enable me to produce something worth preserving.

You will see in your book—which I beg your pardon for detaining so long<sup>1</sup>—that I have been tuning my lyre on the banks of Nith. Some large poetic plans that are floating in my imagination, or partly put in execution, I shall impart to you when I have the pleasure of meeting with you, which, if you are then in Edinburgh, I shall have about the beginning of March.

That acquaintance, worthy sir, with which you were pleased to honour me, you must still allow me to challenge; for with whatever unconcern I give up my transient connection with the merely great, I cannot lose the patronising notice of the learned and good without the bitterest regret.

R. B.

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TO MR JAMES BURNES.

ELLISLAND, 24 Feb. 1793.

MY DEAR SIR—Why I did not write to you long ago, is what—even on the rack—I could not answer. If you can in your mind form an idea of indolence, dissipation, hurry, cares, change of country, entering on untried scenes of life, all combined, you will save me the

<sup>1</sup> A copy of Burns's Poems, belonging to Dr Geddes, into which the poet had transferred some of his more recent verses.

trouble of a blushing apology. It could not be want of regard for a man for whom I had a high esteem before I knew him—an esteem which has much increased since I did know him; and, this caveat entered, I shall plead guilty to any other indictment with which you shall please to charge me.

After I parted from you, for many months my life was one continued scene of dissipation. Here at last I am become stationary, and have taken a farm and—a wife.

The farm is beautifully situated on the Nith, a large river that runs by Dumfries, and falls into the Solway Frith. I have gotten a lease of my farm as long as I pleased; but how it may turn out is just a guess, and it is yet to improve and enclose, &c.; however, I have good hopes of my bargain on the whole.

My wife is my Jean, with whose story you are partly acquainted. I found I had a much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and I durst not trifle with so sacred a deposit. Indeed, I have not any reason to repent the step I have taken, as I have attached myself to a very good wife, and have shaken myself loose of a very bad failing.

I have found my book a very profitable business; and with the profits of it I have begun life pretty decently. Should fortune not favour me in farming, as I have no great faith in her fickle ladyship, I have provided myself in another resource, which, however some folks may affect to despise it, is still a comfortable shift in the day of misfortune. In the heyday of my fame, a gentleman, whose name at least I dare say you know, as his estate lies somewhere near Dundee—Mr Graham of Fintry, one of the commissioners of Excise—offered me the commission of an Excise-officer. I thought it prudent to accept the offer; and accordingly I took my instructions, and have my commission by me. Whether I may ever do duty, or be a penny the better for it, is what I do not know; but I have the comfortable assurance, that, come whatever ill-fate will, I can, on my simple petition to the Excise-board, get into employ.

We have lost poor uncle Robert this winter. He has long been very weak, and with very little alteration on him: he expired 3d January.

His son William has been with me this winter, and goes in May to be an apprentice to a mason. His other son, the eldest, John, comes to me, I expect, in summer. They are both remarkably stout young fellows, and promise to do well. His only daughter, Fanny, has been with me ever since her father's death, and I purpose keeping her in my family till she be quite woman-grown, and fit for better service. She is one of the cleverest girls, and has one of the most amiable dispositions I have ever seen.<sup>1</sup>

All friends in this county and Ayrshire are well. Remember me to all friends in the north. My wife joins me in compliments to Mrs B. and family. I am ever, my dear cousin, yours sincerely,

R. B.

<sup>1</sup> This young woman afterwards married a brother of Mrs Burns.



About the end of February Burns paid his proposed visit to Edinburgh, in order to have a further 'racking of accounts' with Creech. He would now be entitled to receive payment in respect of sales effected during the last half of the year 1787 and the first half of 1788: from an expression dropped in one of his letters, the sum appears to have been about £50; and it further appears that Burns was satisfied with the degree of justice measured out to him by the publisher.

Burns had a younger brother named William, who had been brought up as a saddler, and was now in search of employment. This youth had visited the poet at the Isle early in the preceding month, and had been kindly treated. There is something interesting in the conduct of Burns towards this young relative, so different from himself in an intellectual respect and in importance in the world's eye, yet possessing a claim of equality as another child of the same parents. William appears to have paid a visit to his brother about the end of 1788, and spent some weeks with him. The young man had then proceeded to Longtown, in search of employment in his business, which he had readily obtained. Though his education was greatly inferior to that of Robert and Gilbert, and his highest ambition was to be a good journeyman saddler, he seems to have had some small share of that natural readiness and propriety of diction which so remarkably distinguished his elder brothers, and the eldest particularly. We find him thus addressing the poet (15th February 1789):—'I know not how it happened, but you were more shy of your counsel than I could have wished the time I stayed with you: whether it was because you thought it would disgust me to have my faults freely told me while I was dependent on you, or whether it was because you saw that, by my indolent disposition, your instructions would have no effect, I cannot determine; but if it proceeded from any of these causes, the reason of withholding your admonition is done away, for I now stand on my own bottom, and that indolence which I am very conscious of, is something rubbed off, by being called to act in life whether I will or not; and my inexperience, which I daily feel, makes me wish for that advice which you are so able to give, and which I can only expect from you or Gilbert, since the loss of the kindest and ablest of fathers.

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ISLE, 2d March 1789.

MY DEAR WILLIAM—I arrived from Edinburgh only the night before last, so could not answer your epistle sooner. I congratulate you on the prospect of employ; and I am indebted to you for one of

the best letters that has been written by any mechanic-lad in Nithsdale, or Annandale, or any dale on either side of the border, this twelvemonth. Not that I would have you always affect the stately stilts of studied composition, but surely writing a handsome letter is an accomplishment worth courting; and, with attention and practice, I can promise you that it will soon be an accomplishment of yours. If my advice can serve you—that is to say, if you can resolve to accustom yourself not only in reviewing your own deportment, manners, &c. but also in carrying your consequent resolutions of amending the faulty parts into practice—my small knowledge and experience of the world is heartily at your service. I intended to have given you a sheetful of counsels, but some business has prevented me. In a word, learn taciturnity; let that be your motto. Though you had the wisdom of Newton, or the wit of Swift, garrulousness would lower you in the eyes of your fellow-creatures. I'll probably write you next week.—I am your brother,

ROBERT BURNS.<sup>1</sup>

The union with Jean had of course closed the hopes of Clarinda. The lady heard of the event with indignation, having had all possible reason to hope that Burns might sooner or later be her own. In a letter to Burns, which has not been preserved, she appears to have expressed her opinion of his conduct in the plainest terms. He made this answer, at once justificatory of himself, and preserving due respect towards the lady:—

TO CLARINDA.

9th March 1789.

MADAM—The letter you wrote me to Heron's carried its own answer in its bosom; you forbade me to write you, unless I was willing to plead guilty to a certain indictment that you were pleased to bring against me. As I am convinced of my own innocence, and, though conscious of high imprudence and egregious folly, can lay my hand on my breast and attest the rectitude of my heart, you will pardon me, madam, if I do not carry my complaisance so far as humbly to acquiesce in the name of Villain, merely out of compliment to your opinion, much as I esteem your judgment, and warmly as I regard your worth.

I have already told you, and I again aver it, that at the period of time alluded to, I was not under the smallest moral tie to Mrs Burns; nor did I, nor could I then know, all the powerful circumstances that omnipotent necessity was busy laying in wait for me. When you call over the scenes that have passed between us, you will survey the conduct of an honest man, struggling successfully with temptations, the most powerful that ever beset humanity, and

<sup>1</sup> The original of this letter is in possession of Mrs Begg.

preserving untainted honour, in situations where the austere virtue would have forgiven a fall; situations that, I will dare to say, not a single individual of all his kind, even with half his sensibility and passion, could have encountered without ruin; and I leave you to guess, madam, how such a man is likely to digest an accusation of perfidious treachery.

Was I to blame, madam, in being the distracted victim of charms which, I affirm it, no man ever approached with impunity? Had I seen the least glimmering of hope that these charms could ever have been mine; or even had not iron necessity— But these are unavailing words.

I would have called on you when I was in town; indeed I could not have resisted it, but that Mr Ainslie told me that you were determined to avoid your windows while I was in town, lest even a glance of me should occur in the street.

When I shall have regained your good opinion, perhaps I may venture to solicit your friendship; but, be that as it may, the first of her sex I ever knew shall always be the object of my warmest good wishes.

A Rev. Mr Carfrae, a friend of Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, had addressed the following letter to Burns:—

2d January 1789.

SIR—If you have lately seen Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop, you have certainly heard of the author of the verses which accompany this letter. He was a man highly respectable for every accomplishment and virtue which adorns the character of a man or a Christian. To a great degree of literature, of taste, and poetic genius, was added an invincible modesty of temper, which prevented, in a great degree, his figuring in life, and confined the perfect knowledge of his character and talents to the small circle of his chosen friends. He was untimely taken from us a few weeks ago by an inflammatory fever, in the prime of life; beloved by all who enjoyed his acquaintance, and lamented by all who have any regard for virtue or genius. There is a wo pronounced in Scripture against the person whom all men speak well of; if ever that wo fell upon the head of mortal man, it fell upon him. He has left behind him a considerable number of compositions, chiefly poetical; sufficient, I imagine, to make a large octavo volume. In particular, two complete and regular tragedies, a farce of three acts, and some smaller poems on different subjects. It falls to my share, who have lived on the most intimate and uninterrupted friendship with him from my youth upwards, to transmit to you the verses he wrote on the publication of your incomparable poems. It is probable they were his last, as they were found in his scrutoire, folded up with the form of a letter addressed to you, and, I imagine, were only prevented from being sent by himself, by that melancholy dispensation which we still bemoan. The verses themselves I will not pretend to criticise, when writing to a gentleman whom I consider as entirely qualified to judge of their merit. They are the only verses

he seems to have attempted in the Scottish style ; and I hesitate not to say, in general, that they will bring no dishonour on the Scottish muse : and allow me to add, that, if it is your opinion they are not unworthy of the author, and will be no discredit to you, it is the inclination of Mr Mylne's friends that they should be immediately published in some periodical work, to give the world a specimen of what may be expected from his performances in the poetic line, which, perhaps, will be afterwards published for the advantage of his family. . . . .

I must beg the favour of a letter from you, acknowledging the receipt of this, and to be allowed to subscribe myself, with great regard, sir, your most obedient servant,  
P. CARFRAE.

In a letter which Burns addressed to Mrs Dunlop immediately after his return from Edinburgh, he adverts to Mr Carfrae's application :—

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 4th March 1789.

Here am I, my honoured friend, returned safe from the capital. To a man who has a home, however humble or remote—if that home is like mine, the scene of domestic comfort—the bustle of Edinburgh will soon be a business of sickening disgust.

' Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate you ! '

When I must skulk into a corner, lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim : ' What merits has he had, or what demerit have I had, in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule, and the key of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into the world, the sport of folly, or the victim of pride ? ' I have read somewhere of a monarch (in Spain I think it was), who was so out of humour with the Ptolemæan system of astronomy, that he said, had he been of the Creator's council, he could have saved him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend this blasphemous speech ; but often, as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Princes Street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a nail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a prospect-glass. This trifling alteration, not to mention the prodigious saving it would be in the tear and wear of the neck and limb sinews of many of his majesty's liege-subjects, in the way of tossing the head and tiptoe strutting, would evidently turn out a vast advantage, in enabling us at once to adjust the ceremonials in making a bow, or making way to a great man, and that too within a second of the precise spherical angle of reverence, or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the

important creature itself requires ; as a measuring-glance at its towering altitude would determine the affair like instinct.

You are right, madam, in your idea of poor Mylne's poem, which he has addressed to me. The piece has a good deal of merit, but it has one great fault—it is by far too long. Besides, my success has encouraged such a shoal of ill-spawned monsters to crawl into public notice, under the title of Scottish poets, that the very term, Scottish poetry, borders on the burlesque. When I write to Mr Carfrae, I shall advise him rather to try one of his deceased friend's English pieces. I am prodigiously hurried with my own matters, else I would have requested a perusal of all Mylne's poetic performances, and would have offered his friends my assistance in either selecting or correcting what would be proper for the press. What it is that occupies me so much, and perhaps a little oppresses my present spirits, shall fill up a paragraph in some future letter. In the meantime, allow me to close this epistle with a few lines done by a friend of mine. . . . I give you them, that, as you have seen the original, you may guess whether one or two alterations I have ventured to make in them be any real improvement.

' Like the fair plant that from our touch withdraws,  
Shrink, mildly fearful, even from applause,  
Be all a mother's fondest hope can dream,  
And all you are, my charming \*\*\*\*, seem.  
Straight as the foxglove, ere her bells disclose,  
Mild as the maiden-blushing hawthorn blows,  
Fair as the fairest of each lovely kind,  
Your form shall be the image of your mind ;  
Your manners shall so true your soul express,  
That all shall long to know the worth they guess ;  
Congenial hearts shall greet with kindred love,  
And even sick'ning envy must approve.'<sup>1</sup>

R. B.

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TO THE REV. P. CARFRAE.

[ELLISLAND, March 1789 ?]

REV. SIR—I do not recollect that I have ever felt a severer pang of shame, than on looking at the date of your obliging letter which accompanied Mr Mylne's poem.

I am much to blame: the honour Mr Mylne has done me, greatly enhanced in its value by the endearing, though melancholy circumstance of its being the last production of his muse, deserved a better return.

I have, as you hint, thought of sending a copy of the poem to some periodical publication; but, on second thoughts, I am afraid that, in the present case, it would be an improper step. My success, perhaps as much accidental as merited, has brought an inundation of

<sup>1</sup> These beautiful lines, we have reason to believe, are the production of the lady to whom this letter is addressed.—CURRIE.

nonsense under the name of Scottish poetry. Subscription-bills for Scottish poems have so dunned, and daily do dun the public, that the very name is in danger of contempt. For these reasons, if publishing any of Mr Mylne's poems in a magazine, &c. be at all prudent, in my opinion it certainly should not be a Scottish poem. The profits of the labours of a man of genius are, I hope, as honourable as any profits whatever; and Mr Mylne's relations are most justly entitled to that honest harvest which fate has denied himself to reap. But let the friends of Mr Mylne's fame (among whom I crave the honour of ranking myself) always keep in eye his respectability as a man and as a poet, and take no measure that, before the world knows anything about him, would risk his name and character being classed with the fools of the times.

I have, sir, some experience of publishing; and the way in which I would proceed with Mr Mylne's poems is this:—I will publish, in two or three English and Scottish public papers, any one of his English poems which should, by private judges, be thought the most excellent, and mention it at the same time as one of the productions of a Lothian farmer of respectable character, lately deceased, whose poems his friends had it in idea to publish soon by subscription, for the sake of his numerous family; not in pity to that family, but in justice to what his friends think the poetic merits of the deceased; and to secure, in the most effectual manner, to those tender connections, whose right it is, the pecuniary reward of those merits.

R. B.<sup>1</sup>

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TO MR PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

[ELLISLAND, March 1789 ?]

MY DEAR HILL—I shall say nothing to your mad present<sup>2</sup>—you have so long and often been of important service to me, and I suppose you mean to go on conferring obligations until I shall not be able to lift up my face before you. In the meantime, as Sir Roger de Coverley, because it happened to be a cold day in which he made his will, ordered his servants greatcoats for mourning; so, because I have been this week plagued with an indigestion, I have sent you by the carrier a fine old ewe-milk cheese.

Indigestion is the devil—nay, 'tis the devil and all. It besets a man in every one of his senses. I lose my appetite at the sight of successful knavery, and sicken to loathing at the noise and nonsense of self-important folly. When the hollow-hearted wretch takes me by the hand, the feeling spoils my dinner; the proud man's wine so offends my palate, that it chokes me in the gullet; and the *pulverised*, feathered, pert coxcomb is so disgusting in my nostril, that my stomach turns.

<sup>1</sup> 'Poems, consisting of Miscellaneous Pieces, and two Tragedies, by the late Mr Mylne of Lochell,' are advertised by Mr Creech as published in July 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Mr Hill had sent the poet a present of books.

If ever you have any of these disagreeable sensations, let me prescribe for you patience and a bit of my cheese. I know that you are no niggard of your good things among your friends, and some of them are in much need of a slice. There, in my eye, is our friend Smellie—a man positively of the first abilities and greatest strength of mind, as well as one of the best hearts and keenest wits that I have ever met with; when you see him—as alas! he too is smarting at the pinch of distressful circumstances, aggravated by the sneer of contumelious greatness—a bit of my cheese alone will not cure him; but if you add a tankard of brown stout, and superadd a magnum of right Oporto, you will see his sorrows vanish like the morning mist before the summer sun.

Candlish, the earliest friend, except my only brother, that I have on earth, and one of the worthiest fellows that ever any man called by the name of friend, if a luncheon of my best cheese would help to rid him of some of his superabundant modesty, you would do well to give it him.

David,<sup>1</sup> with his *Courant*, comes, too, across my recollection, and I beg you will help him largely from the said ewe-milk cheese, to enable him to digest those damned bedaubing paragraphs with which he is eternally larding the lean characters of certain great men in a certain great town. I grant you the periods are very well turned; so, a fresh egg<sup>2</sup> is a very good thing; but when thrown at a man in a pillory, it does not at all improve his figure, not to mention the irreparable loss of the egg.

My facetious friend Dunbar I would wish also to be a partaker; not to digest his spleen, for that he laughs off, but to digest his last night's wine at the last field-day of the Crochallan corps.<sup>3</sup>

Among our common friends I must not forget one of the dearest of them—Cunningham.<sup>3</sup> The brutality, insolence, and selfishness of a world unworthy of having such a fellow as he is in it, I know sticks in his stomach, and if you can help him to anything that will make him a little easier on that score, it will be very obliging.

As to honest John Somerville, he is such a contented, happy man, that I know not what can annoy him, except, perhaps, he may not have got the better of a parcel of modest anecdotes which a certain poet gave him one night at supper the last time the said poet was in town.

Though I have mentioned so many men of law, I shall have nothing to do with them professionally—the faculty are beyond my prescription. As to their clients, that is another thing—God knows, they have much to digest!

The clergy I pass by: their profundity of erudition and their liberality of sentiment, their total want of pride and their detestation of hypocrisy, are so proverbially notorious, as to place them far, far above either my praise or censure.

<sup>1</sup> Mr David Ramsay, printer of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*.

<sup>2</sup> A club of choice spirits, already frequently alluded to.

<sup>3</sup> Mr Alexander Cunningham.

I was going to mention a man of worth, whom I have the honour to call friend, the Laird of Craigdarroch; but I have spoken to the landlord of the King's-Arms Inn here to have at the next county meeting a large ewe-milk cheese on the table, for the benefit of the Dumfriesshire Whigs, to enable them to digest the Duke of Queensberry's late political conduct.

I have just this moment an opportunity of a private hand to Edinburgh, as perhaps you would not digest double postage. So God bless you.

R. B.

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TO DR MOORE.

ELLISLAND, 23d March 1789.

SIR—The gentleman who will deliver this is a Mr Nielson, a worthy clergyman in my neighbourhood,<sup>1</sup> and a very particular acquaintance of mine. As I have troubled him with this packet, I must turn him over to your goodness, to recompense him for it in a way in which he much needs your assistance, and where you can effectually serve him. Mr Nielson is on his way for France, to wait on his Grace of Queensberry, on some little business of a good deal of importance to him; and he wishes for your instructions respecting the most eligible mode of travelling, &c. for him when he has crossed the Channel. I should not have dared to take this liberty with you, but that I am told, by those who have the honour of your personal acquaintance, that to be a poor honest Scotchman is a letter of recommendation to you, and that to have it in your power to serve such a character gives you much pleasure.

The enclosed Ode is a compliment to the memory of the late Mrs Oswald of Auchencruive. You probably knew her personally, an honour of which I cannot boast; but I spent my early years in her neighbourhood, and among her servants and tenants. I know that she was detested with the most heartfelt cordiality. However, in the particular part of her conduct which roused my poetic wrath, she was much less blameable. In January last, on my road to Ayrshire, I had put up at Bailie Whigham's, in Sanquhar, the only tolerable inn in the place. The frost was keen, and the grim evening and howling wind were ushering in a night of snow and drift. My horse and I were both much fatigued with the labours of the day, and just as my friend the bailie and I were bidding defiance to the storm, over a smoking bowl, in wheels the funeral pageantry of the late great Mrs Oswald, and poor I am forced to brave all the horrors of the tempestuous night, and jade my horse—my young favourite horse, whom I had just christened Pegasus—twelve miles farther on, through the wildest moors and hills of Ayrshire, to New Cumnock, the next inn. The powers of poesy and prose sink under me when

<sup>1</sup> The Reverend Edward Nielson, minister of Kirkbean, in the Stewartry of Kirkcubright.



I would describe what I felt. Suffice it to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the enclosed Ode.

I was at Edinburgh lately, and settled finally with Mr Creech; and I must own that at last he has been amicable and fair with me.

R. B.

Dr Moore's answer to this letter was as follows:—

CLIFFORD STREET, 10th June 1789.

DEAR SIR—I thank you for the different communications you have made me of your occasional productions in manuscript; all of which have merit, and some of them merit of a different kind from what appears in the poems you have published. You ought carefully to preserve all your occasional productions, to correct and improve them at your leisure; and when you can select as many of these as will make a volume, publish it either at Edinburgh or London by subscription: on such an occasion it may be in my power, as it is very much in my inclination, to be of service to you.

If I were to offer an opinion, it would be, that in your future productions, you should abandon the Scottish stanza and dialect, and adopt the measure and language of modern English poetry.

The stanza which you use in imitation of *Christ Kirk on the Green*, with the tiresome repetition of 'that day,' is fatiguing to English ears, and I should think not very agreeable to Scottish.

All the fine satire and humour of your *Holy Fair* is lost on the English; yet, without more trouble to yourself, you could have conveyed the whole to them. The same is true of some of your other poems. In your *Epistle to J. Smith*, the stanzas from that beginning with this line, 'This life, so far's I understand,' to that which ends with, 'Short while it grieves,' are easy, flowing, gaily philosophical, and of Horatian elegance—the language is English, with a few Scottish words, and some of those so harmonious as to add to the beauty; for what poet would not prefer *gloaming* to *twilight*?

I imagine that, by carefully keeping, and occasionally polishing and correcting those verses which the Muse dictates, you will within a year or two have another volume as large as the first ready for the press; and this without diverting you from every proper attention to the study and practice of husbandry, in which I understand you are very learned, and which I fancy you will choose to adhere to as a wife, while poetry amuses you from time to time as a mistress. The former, like a prudent wife, must not shew ill-humour although you retain a sneaking kindness to this agreeable gipsy, and pay her occasional visits, which in no manner alienates your heart from your lawful spouse, but tends, on the contrary, to promote her interest.

I desired Mr Cadell to write to Mr Creech to send you a copy of *Zeluco*. This performance has had great success here; but I shall be glad to have your opinion of it, because I value your opinion, and because I know you are above saying what you do not think.

I beg you will offer my best wishes to my very good friend Mrs Hamilton, who, I understand, is your neighbour. If she is as happy as I wish her, she is happy enough. Make my compliments also to Mrs Burns; and believe me to be, with sincere esteem, dear sir, yours, &c.

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TO MR WILLIAM BURNS.

ISLE, 25th March 1789.

I HAVE stolen from my corn-sowing this minute to write a line to accompany your shirt and hat, for I can no more. Write me every opportunity—never mind postage. My head, too, is as addle as an egg this morning with dining abroad yesterday. I received yours by the mason. Forgive this foolish-looking scrawl of an epistle. I am ever, my dear William, yours, R. B.

*P. S.*—If you are not then gone from Longtown, I'll write you a long letter by this day se'ennight. If you should not succeed in your tramps, don't be dejected, or take any rash step—return to us in that case, and we will court Fortune's better humour. Remember this, I charge you.<sup>1</sup>

It is a most creditable fact in Burns's life, that, long before the time when the intellectual improvement of the humbler classes had become a national movement, he exerted himself to the utmost in that cause, as far as his own locality was concerned. Already, under the care of Captain Riddel and that of the poet, a parish library was about to be established in their neighbourhood. Burns took the trouble of selecting and purchasing books. For this purpose he opened a correspondence with a worthy young bookseller named Hill, till lately the factotum of Creech, but now in business for himself. During his negotiations with Creech, Burns, while always feeling less and less favourably affected to the principal, had at the same time become more and more attached to the subaltern, by reason of his pleasant manners and geniality of nature. He now, therefore, regarded Hill as his bookseller for Edinburgh.

TO MR PETER HILL.

ELLISLAND, 2d April 1789.

I WILL make no excuse, my dear Bibliopolus (God forgive me for murdering language!) that I have sat down to write you on this vile paper, stained with the sanguinary scores of 'thae cursed horse-leeches o' the Excise.'

<sup>1</sup> Printed in the *Kilmarnock Journal* (thence first transferred to Hogg and Motherwell's edition) from the original, which is described as shewn at the Red Lion Tavern, Shakspeare Square, Edinburgh.

It is economy, sir; it is that cardinal virtue, prudence; so I beg you will sit down, and either compose or borrow a panegyric. If you are going to borrow, apply to our friend Ramsay,<sup>1</sup> for the assistance of the author of the pretty little buttering paragraphs of eulogium on your thrice-honoured and never-enough-to-be-praised MAGISTRACY—how they hunt down a housebreaker with the sanguinary perseverance of a bloodhound—how they outdo a terrier in a badger-hole in unearthing a resetter of stolen goods—how they steal on a thoughtless troop of night-nymphs as a spaniel winds the unsuspecting covey—or how they riot over a ravaged \* \* as a cat does o'er a plundered mouse-nest—how they new vamp old churches, aiming at appearances of piety, plan squares and colleges, to pass for men of taste and learning, &c. &c. &c.; while Old Edinburgh, like the doting mother of a parcel of rakehell prodigals, may sing *Hoolly and fairly*, or cry *Wae's me that e'er I saw ye!* but still must put her hand in her pocket, and pay whatever scores the young dogs think proper to contract.

I was going to say—but this parenthesis has put me out of breath—that you should get that manufacturer of the tinselled crockery of magistratral reputations, who makes so distinguished and distinguishing a figure in the *Evening Courant*, to compose, or rather to compound, something very clever on my remarkable frugality; that I write to one of my most esteemed friends on this wretched paper, which was originally intended for the venal fiat of some drunken exciseman, to take dirty notes in a miserable vault of an ale-cellar.

O Frugality! thou mother of ten thousand blessings—thou cook of fat beef and dainty greens! thou manufacturer of warm Shetland hose and comfortable surtouts! thou old housewife, darning thy decayed stockings with thy ancient spectacles on thy aged nose—lead me, hand me in thy clutching palsied fist, up those heights and through those thickets hitherto inaccessible and impervious to my anxious, weary feet—not those Parnassian crags, bleak and barren, where the hungry worshippers of fame are, breathless, clambering, hanging between heaven and hell, but those glittering cliffs of Potosi, where the all-sufficient, all-powerful deity, Wealth, holds his immediate court of joys and pleasures; where the sunny exposure of plenty, and the hot walls of profusion, produce those blissful fruits of luxury, exotics in this world, and natives of paradise! Thou withered sibyl, my sage conductress, usher me into thy refulgent, adored presence! The power, splendid and potent as he now is, was once the puling nursing of thy faithful care and tender arms! Call me thy son, thy cousin, thy kinsman, or favourite, and adjure the god by the scenes of his infant years no longer to repulse me as a stranger or an alien, but to favour me with his peculiar countenance and protection! He daily bestows his greatest kindness on the undeserving and the worthless—assure him that I bring ample documents of

<sup>1</sup> Mr David Ramsay, of the *Edinburgh Courant*.

meritorious demerits! Pledge yourself for me, that, for the glorious cause of lucre, I will do anything, be anything but the horse-leech of private oppression, or the vulture of public robbery!

But to descend from heroics—what in the name of all the devils at once have you done with my trunk? Please let me have it by the first carrier.

I want a *Shakspeare*: let me know what plays your used copy of *Bell's Shakspeare* wants. I want likewise an English dictionary—Johnson's, I suppose, is best. In these and all my *prose* commissions the cheapest is always the best for me. There is a small debt of honour that I owe Mr Robert Cleghorn, in Saughton Mills, my worthy friend and your well-wisher. Please give him, and urge him to take it, the first time you see him, ten shillings' worth of anything you have to sell, and place it to my account.

The library scheme that I mentioned to you is already begun under the direction of Captain Riddel and me. There is another in emulation of it going on at Closeburn, under the auspices of Mr Monteath of Closeburn, which will be on a greater scale than ours. I have likewise secured it for you. Captain Riddel gave his infant society a great many of his old books, else I had written you on that subject; but one of these days, I shall trouble you with a commission for the Monkland Friendly Society. A copy of *The Spectator*, *Mirror*, and *Lounger*, *Man of Feeling*, *Man of the World*, *Guthrie's Geographical Grammar*, with some religious pieces, will likely be our first order.

When I grow richer I will write to you on gilt-post, to make amends for this sheet. At present every guinea has a five-guinea errand with, my dear sir, your faithful, poor, but honest friend,

R. B.

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TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 4th April 1789.

I no sooner hit on any poetic plan or fancy, but I wish to send it to you; and if knowing and reading these give half the pleasure to you that communicating them to you gives to me, I am satisfied.

I have a poetic whim in my head, which I at present dedicate, or rather inscribe, to the Right Hon. Charles James Fox; but how long that fancy may hold I cannot say. A few of the first lines I have just rough-sketched as follows:—

SKETCH,

INSCRIBED TO CHARLES JAMES FOX.

How wisdom and folly meet, mix, and unite;  
How virtue and vice blend their black and their white;  
How genius, the illustrious father of fiction,  
Confounds rule and law, reconciles contradiction—

I sing: if these mortals, the critics, should bustle,  
I care not, not I, let the critics go whistle.

But now for a Patron, whose name and whose glory  
At once may illustrate and honour my story.

Thou first of our orators, first of our wits,  
Yet whose parts and acquirements seem mere lucky hits;  
With knowledge so vast, and with judgment so strong,  
No man with the half of 'em e'er went far wrong;  
With passions so potent, and fancies so bright,  
No man with the half of 'em e'er went quite right:  
A sorry, poor misbegot son of the Muses,  
For using thy name offers fifty excuses.<sup>1</sup>

[Good L—d, what is man? for as simple he looks,  
Do but try to develop his hooks and his crooks;  
With his depths and his shallows, his good and his evil,  
All in all he's a problem must puzzle the devil.

On his one ruling passion Sir Pope hugely labours,  
That, like th' old Hebrew walking-switch, eats up its neighbours:  
Mankind are his show-box—a friend, would you know him?  
Pull the string, ruling passion the picture will shew him.  
What pity, in rearing so beauteous a system,  
One trifling particular, truth, should have miss'd him;  
For, spite of his fine theoretic positions,  
Mankind is a science defies definitions.

Some sort all our qualities each to its tribe,  
And think human nature they truly describe;  
Have you found this, or t'other! there's more in the wind,  
As by one drunken fellow his comrades you'll find.  
But such is the flaw, or the depth of the plan,  
In the make of that wonderful creature call'd man,  
No two virtues, whatever relation they claim,  
Nor even two different shades of the same,  
Though like as was ever twin-brother to brother,  
Possessing the one shall imply you've the other.<sup>2</sup>

But truce with abstraction and truce with the Muse,  
Whose rhymes you'll perhaps, sir, ne'er deign to peruse:  
Will you leave your justings, your jars, and your quarrels,  
Contending with Billy for proud-nodding laurels.  
My much-honoured Patron, believe your poor Poet,  
Your courage much more than your prudence you shew it:

<sup>1</sup> The verses following within brackets were added afterwards.

<sup>2</sup> The verses following this line were first printed from a manuscript of Burns, in Pickering's edition.

In vain with Squire Billy for laurels you struggle,  
 He'll have them by fair trade, if not he will smuggle;  
 Not cabinets even of kings would conceal 'em,  
 He'd up the back-stairs, and by G— he would steal 'em!  
 Then feats like Squire Billy's you ne'er can achieve 'em,  
 It is not, outdo him—the task is, out-thieve him!]

On the 20th current I hope to have the honour of assuring you  
 in person how sincerely I am,  
 R. B.

In his letter to Mr Peter Hill two days before, Burns had desired to learn as soon as possible the address of Stuart, publisher of the *Star* newspaper, but under secrecy. He probably designed to send the above sketch to the *Star*.

Our poet had paid a visit this spring to Mr M'Murdo at Drumlanrig Castle, and had been charmed by the kindness of his reception in that elegant circle. Having occasion soon after to send to Mrs M'Murdo a poem which he had recited to her family in an imperfect state, he accompanied it with a letter expressing that courteous gratitude which he always felt towards persons of superior rank who treated him with unaffected friendliness.

## TO MRS M'MURDO, DRUMLANRIG.

ELLISLAND, 2d May 1789.

MADAM—I have finished the piece which had the happy fortune to be honoured with your approbation; and never did little miss with more sparkling pleasure shew her applauded sampler to partial mamma, than I now send my poem to you and Mr M'Murdo, if he is returned to Drumlanrig. You cannot easily imagine what thin-skinned animals, what sensitive plants, poor poets are. How do we shrink into the imbittered corner of self-abasement when neglected or condemned by those to whom we look up!—and how do we, in erect importanee, add another cubit to our stature on being noticed and applauded by those whom we honour and respect! My late visit to Drumlanrig has, I can tell you, madam, given me a balloon waft up Parnassus, where on my fancied elevation I regard my poetic self with no small degree of complacency. Surely, with all their sins, the rhyming tribe are not ungrateful creatures. I recollect your goodness to your humble guest—I see Mr M'Murdo adding to the politeness of the gentleman the kindness of a friend, and my heart swells as it would burst with warm emotions and ardent wishes! It may be it is not gratitude—it may be a mixed sensation. That strange, shifting, doubling animal MAN is so generally, at best, but a negative, often a worthless creature, that we cannot see real goodness and native worth without feeling the bosom glow with sympathetic approbation. With every sentiment of grateful respect, I have the honour to be, madam, your obliged and grateful, humble servant,  
 R. B.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 4th May 1789.

MY DEAR SIR—Your *duty-free* favour of the 26th April I received two days ago : I will not say I perused it with pleasure—that is the cold compliment of ceremony—I perused it, sir, with delicious satisfaction ; in short, it is such a letter, that not you, nor your friend, but the legislature, by express proviso in their postage-laws, should frank. A letter informed with the soul of friendship is such an honour to human nature, that they should order it free ingress and egress to and from their bags and mails, as an encouragement and mark of distinction to supereminent virtue.

I have just put the last hand to a little poem, which I think will be something to your taste. One morning lately, as I was out pretty early in the fields, sowing some grass seeds, I heard the burst of a shot from a neighbouring plantation, and presently a poor little wounded hare came crippling by me. You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow who could shoot a hare at this season, when all of them have young ones. Indeed, there is something in that business of destroying for our sport individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, which I could never reconcile to my ideas of virtue.

Inhuman man ! curse on thy barb'rous art,  
And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye !  
May never pity soothe thee with a sigh,  
Nor ever pleasure glad thy cruel heart !

Go live, poor wanderer of the wood and field,  
The bitter little that of life remains :  
No more the thickening brakes or verdant plains  
To thee a home, or food, or pastime yield.

Seek, mangled innocent, some wonted form ;  
That wonted form, alas ! thy dying bed !  
The sheltering rushes whistling o'er thy head,  
The cold earth with thy blood-stain'd bosom warm.

Perhaps a mother's anguish adds its woe ;  
The playful pair crowd fondly by thy side ;  
Ah ! helpless nurslings, who will now provide  
That life a mother only can bestow !

Oft as by winding Nith I, musing, wait  
The sober eve, or hail the cheerful dawn,  
I'll miss thee sporting o'er the dewy lawn,  
And curse the ruthless wretch, and mourn thy hapless fate.

Let me know how you like my poem. I am doubtful whether it

would not be an improvement to keep out the last stanza but one altogether.

Cruikshank is a glorious production of the Author of man.<sup>1</sup> You, he, and the noble Colonel<sup>2</sup> of the Crochallan Fencibles are to me

‘ Dear as the ruddy drops which warm my heart.’<sup>3</sup>

I have got a good mind to make verses on you all, to the tune of  
‘ Three guid fellows ayont the glen.’ R. B.

The tenderness of Burns towards animals is one of the feelings most conspicuous in his verse after amatory passion: witness the *Farmer's Address to his Mare*, the verses on *The Winter Night*, the *Address to the Mouse*, and several other pieces.<sup>4</sup> He could treat the passion of a Tam Samson jocularly; and I have been informed that, when visiting Mr Bushby at Tinwald Downs, he would accompany the gentlemen-visitors to the field to witness their sport. His deliberate feelings regarding field-sports appear, however, to be presented in *The Brigs of Ayr*:

‘ The thundering guns are heard on every side,  
The wounded coveys, reeling, scatter wide;  
The feathered field-mates bound by nature's tie,  
Sires, mothers, children, in one carnage lie;  
(What warm poetic heart but inly bleeds,  
And execrates man's savage, ruthless deeds!)

There is no trace of his having ever personally engaged in field-sports, and only one notice of his using the fishing-rod.

There is usually printed in Burns's works a little ode entitled *Delia*, which from its deficiency of force and true feeling some have suspected to be not his composition. Allan Cunningham tells a feasible-enough-looking story regarding it. ‘ One day, when the poet was at Brownhill, in Nithsdale, a friend read some verses composed after the pattern of Pope's song by a person of quality, and said: “ Burns, this is beyond you. The Muse of Kyle cannot match the Muse of London city.” The poet took the paper,

<sup>1</sup> Mr Cruikshank of the High School. We know a gentleman in mature life, who lived as a boarder and pupil with Cruikshank, and to whom the character of the man, in consequence of the severity of his discipline, appeared in a very different light from what it did in the eyes of boon-companion Burns. Mr Cruikshank died in March 1795, thus predeceasing his friend the poet by upwards of a year.

<sup>2</sup> Mr William Dunbar, W.S.

<sup>3</sup> ‘ As dear to me as are the ruddy drops  
That visit my sad heart.’—*Julius Caesar*.

<sup>4</sup> Burns had a favourite collie at Ellisland, with this legend on its collar: ‘ ROBERT BURNS, POET.’—*A. Cunningham*.

‘ His last dog—a fine burly fellow, which survived him some time—was named THURLOW, which I suppose the poet had bestowed on him in compliment to the rough, manly character of the chancellor. You remember Thurlow's famous reply to the Duke of Grafton, in which he challenged comparison with the noble duke as a MAN. This could not fail to take a strong hold of the feelings of Burns.’—*R. Carruthers' MS.*



hummed the verses over, and then recited *Delia, an Ode.*' There is not anything in this anecdote inconsistent with the fact, that Burns sent the ode for insertion in a London newspaper. The journal so honoured was the *Star*, the first of our daily evening papers, set on foot very recently in consequence of the facilities afforded by the new mail-system of Mr Palmer. The publisher was Mr Peter Stuart, who had formed an acquaintance with Burns some years ago, and seems to have been the correspondent who addressed him in February 1787 with some absurd vituperation of the Canongate magistrates for their alleged neglect of Fergusson.<sup>1</sup>

'MR PRINTER—If the productions of a simple ploughman can merit a place in the same paper with Sylvester Otway and the other favourites of the Muses who illuminate the *Star* with the lustre of genius, your insertion of the enclosed trifle will be succeeded by future communications from yours, &c. R. BURNS.

ELLISLAND, near Dumfries, 18th May 1789.'

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DELIA.

Fair the face of orient day,  
Fair the tints of op'ning rose ;  
But fairer still my Delia dawns,  
More lovely far her beauty shews.

Sweet the lark's wild warbled lay,  
Sweet the tinkling rill to hear ;  
But, Delia, more delightful still,  
Steal thine accents on mine ear.

The flower-enamoured busy bee  
The rosy banquet loves to sip ;  
Sweet the streamlet's limpid lapse  
To the sun-browned Arab's lip.

But, Delia, on thy balmy lips  
Let me, no fragrant insect, rove ;  
O let me steal one liquid kiss,  
For, oh ! my soul is parched with love !

The poem on the Hare had been also sent by him to Dr Gregory of Edinburgh, for whose critical judgment and general character Burns, as we have seen, entertained a high veneration. He who had been so lenient with Clarinda's versicles chose to be strict with this piece of Burns.

<sup>1</sup> See Volume II., p. 45.

TO MR ROBERT BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 2d June 1789.

DEAR SIR—I take the first leisure hour I could command to thank you for your letter, and the copy of verses enclosed in it. As there is real poetic merit—I mean both fancy and tenderness—and some happy expressions in them, I think they well deserve that you should revise them carefully, and polish them to the utmost. This I am sure you can do if you please, for you have great command both of expression and of rhymes: and you may judge, from the two last pieces of Mrs Hunter's poetry<sup>1</sup> that I gave you, how much correctness and high-polish enhance the value of such compositions. As you desire it, I shall, with great freedom, give you my *most rigorous* criticisms on your verses. I wish you would give me another edition of them, much amended, and I will send it to Mrs Hunter, who, I am sure, will have much pleasure in reading it. Pray give me likewise for myself, and her too, a copy—as much amended as you please—of the *Water-Fowl on Loch Turrit*.

*The Wounded Hare* is a pretty good subject, but the measure or stanza you have chosen for it is not a good one: it does not *flow* well; and the rhyme of the fourth line is almost lost by its distance from the first, and the two interposed close rhymes. If I were you, I would put it into a different stanza yet.

Stanza 1. The execrations in the first two lines are too strong or coarse, but they may pass. 'Murder-aiming' is a bad compound epithet, and not very intelligible. 'Blood-stained' in stanza iii. line 4, has the same fault: *bleeding* bosom is infinitely better. You have accustomed yourself to such epithets, and have no notion how stiff and quaint they appear to others, and how incongruous with poetic fancy and tender sentiments. Suppose Pope had written: 'Why that blood-stained bosom gored,' how would you have liked it? *Form* is neither a poetic nor a dignified, nor a plain common word: it is a mere sportsman's word—unsuitable to pathetic or serious poetry.

'Mangled' is a coarse word. 'Innocent,' in this sense is a nursery word; but both may pass.

Stanza 4. 'Who will now provide that life a mother only can bestow?' will not do at all: it is not grammar—it is not intelligible. Do you mean 'provide for that life which the mother had bestowed and used to provide for?'

There was a ridiculous slip of the pen, 'Feeling,' I suppose, for 'Fellow,' in the title of your copy of verses; but even 'fellow' would be wrong—it is but a colloquial and vulgar word, unsuitable to our sentiments. 'Shot' is improper too. On seeing a *person*—or a sportsman—wound a hare; it is needless to add with what weapon; but if you think otherwise, you should say *with a fouling-piece*.

Let me see you when you come to town, and I will shew you some more of Mrs Hunter's poems.

<sup>1</sup> The wife of the celebrated surgeon, John Hunter. Many of her fugitive poems enjoyed at that time a considerable reputation.

'It must be admitted,' says Dr Currie, 'that this criticism is not more distinguished by its good sense than by its freedom from ceremony. It is impossible not to smile at the manner in which the poet may be supposed to have received it. In fact it appears, as the sailors say, to have thrown him *quite aback*. In a letter which he wrote soon after, he says: "Dr Gregory is a good man, but he crucifies me." And again: "I believe in the iron justice of Dr Gregory; but, like the devils, I believe and tremble." However, he profited by these criticisms, as the reader will find by comparing this first edition of the poem with that elsewhere published.'

The piece, as the poet finally left it, is as follows:—

ON SEEING A WOUNDED HARE LIMP BY ME,

WHICH A FELLOW HAD JUST SHOT.

Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'rous art,  
And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye;  
May never pity soothe thee with a sigh,  
Nor ever pleasure glad thy cruel heart!

Go live, poor wanderer of the wood and field!  
The bitter little that of life remains:  
No more the thickening brakes and verdant plains  
To thee shall home, or food, or pastime yield.

Seek, mangled wretch, some place of wonted rest,  
No more of rest, but now thy dying bed!  
The sheltering rushes whistling o'er thy head,  
The cold earth with thy bloody bosom prest.

Oft as by winding Nith I, musing, wait  
The sober eve, or hail the cheerful dawn,  
I'll miss thee sporting o'er the dewy lawn,  
And curse the ruffian's aim, and mourn thy hapless fate.<sup>1</sup>

If any further criticism might be tolerated on so unimportant a composition, we would express our dissent from the poet regarding the second last verse of the first edition, and our regret that he omitted it, as it appears to us that the image of the young ones crowding round their wounded dam is one of the finest, if not the only very fine one, in the poem.

<sup>1</sup> Allan Cunningham mentions that the poor animal whose sufferings excited this burst of indignation on the part of the poet, was shot by a lad named James Thomson, son of a farmer near Ellisland. Burns, who was near the Nith at the moment, execrated the young man, and spoke of throwing him into the water. We see here the same feeling at work which dictated his rebuke of John Blane, on his running after the dislodged mouse.

LETTER TO JAMES TENNANT OF GLENCONNER.<sup>1</sup>

Auld comrade dear, and brither sinner,  
 How's a' the folk about Glenconner?  
 How do you, this blae eastlin wind,  
 That's like to blaw a body blind?  
 For me, my faculties are frozen,  
 And ilka member nearly dozen'd.  
 I've sent you here, by Johnnie Simson,  
 Twa sage philosophers to glimpse on;  
 Smith, wi' his sympathetic feeling,  
 And Reid, to common-sense appealing.  
 Philosophers have fought and wrangled,  
 And meikle Greek and Latin mangled,  
 Till, wi' their logic jargon tir'd,  
 And in the depth of science mir'd,  
 To common-sense they now appeal,  
 What wives and wabsters see and feel.  
 But, hark ye, friend! I charge you strictly,  
 Peruse them, and return them quickly,  
 For now I'm grown sae cursed douce,  
 I pray and ponder butt the house;  
 My shins, my lane, I there sit roastin',  
 Perusing Bunyan, Brown, and Boston;  
 Till by and by, if I haud on,  
 I'll grunt a real gospel groan:  
 Already I begin to try it,  
 To cast my e'en up like a pyet,  
 When by the gun she tumbles o'er,  
 Flutt'ring and gasping in her gore:  
 Sae shortly you shall see me bright,  
 A burning and a shining light.

stupified

My heart-warm love to guid auld Glen,  
 The ace and wale o' honest men:  
 When bending down wi' auld gray hairs,  
 Beneath the load of years and cares,  
 May He who made him still support him,  
 And views beyond the grave comfort him;  
 His worthy fam'ly far and near,  
 God bless them a' wi' grace and gear!

choice

My auld schoolfellow, preacher Willie,  
 The manly tar, my mason Billie,  
 And Auchebay, I wish him joy;  
 If he's a parent, lass or boy,

<sup>1</sup> An old friend of the poet and his family, who assisted him in his choice of the farm of Ellisland.

May he be dad, and Meg the mither,  
 Just five-and-forty years thegither!  
 And no forgetting wabster Charlie,  
 I'm told he offers very fairly.  
 And, Lord, remember singing Sannock,  
 Wi' hale breeks, saxpence, and a bannock;<sup>1</sup>  
 And next my auld acquaintance Nancy,  
 Since she is fitted to her fancy;  
 And her kind stars hae airted till her directed  
 A good chiel wi' a pickle siller.  
 My kindest, best respects I sen' it,  
 To Cousin Kate and Sister Janet;  
 Tell them, frae me, wi' chieles be cautious, lads  
 For, faith, they'll aiblins fin' them fashionable. possibly  
 And lastly, Jamie, for yoursel',  
 May guardian angels tak a spell,  
 And steer you seven miles south o' hell:  
 But first, before you see heaven's glory,  
 May ye get mony a merry story;  
 Mony a laugh, and mony a drink,  
 And aye eneugh o' needfu' clink.  
 Now fare ye weel, and joy be wi' you;  
 For my sake this I beg it o' you,  
 Assist poor Simson a' ye can,  
 Ye'll fin' him just an honest man:  
 Sae I conclude, and quat my chanter,  
 Yours, saint or sinner,

ROB THE RANTER.

TO MR RICHARD BROWN.

MAUCHLINE, 21st May 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I was in the country by accident, and hearing  
 of your safe arrival, I could not resist the temptation of wishing you  
 joy on your return—wishing you would write to me before you sail  
 again—wishing you would always set me down as your bosom-friend  
 —wishing you long life and prosperity, and that every good thing  
 may attend you—wishing Mrs Brown and your little ones as free  
 of the evils of this world as is consistent with humanity—wishing  
 you and she were to make two at the ensuing lying-in, with which  
 Mrs B. threatens very soon to favour me—wishing I had longer  
 time to write to you at present—and, finally, wishing that, if there  
 is to be another state of existence, Mr B., Mrs B., our little ones,  
 and both families, and you and I, in some snug retreat, may make a  
 jovial party to all eternity!

My direction is at Ellisland, near Dumfries. Yours, R. B.

<sup>1</sup> 'Fortune, if thou'll but gie me still,  
 Hale breeks, a scone, and whisky gill,' &c.

.—Scotch Drink.

TO MR JAMES HAMILTON.

ELLISLAND, 26th May 1789.

DEAR SIR—I would fain offer, my dear sir, a word of sympathy with your misfortunes; but it is a tender string, and I know not how to touch it. It is easy to flourish a set of high-flown sentiments on the subjects that would give great satisfaction to—a breast quite at ease; but as ONE observes who was very seldom mistaken in the theory of life: ‘The heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith.’

Among some distressful emergencies that I have experienced in life, I ever laid this down as my foundation of comfort: *That he who has lived the life of an honest man has by no means lived in vain!*

With every wish for your welfare and future success, I am, my dear sir, sincerely yours,  
R. B.

Under the temporary reconciliation produced by the amicable settlement in February, Burns appears to have, with his usual reckless carelessness about his compositions, sent some of the best of his late productions to Creech, who at that time thought of bringing out a new edition of the bard's works.<sup>1</sup> In these days, an author in similar circumstances would deem himself entitled to some certain requital for any additions he might make to a volume which had been the subject of a distinct bargain with a publisher. In the days of the Ayrshire bard such reckonings were less in practice, and nothing of the kind seems to have been thought of by either poet or publisher on this occasion. Having to send in May for a few copies of his volume from the publisher, Burns handed more of his recent compositions to Creech, and at the same time addressed him with an effusion of terms more appropriate to their former intimacy than to the business in hand—

TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ.

ELLISLAND, 30th May 1789.

SIR—I had intended to have troubled you with a long letter; but at present the delightful sensations of an omnipotent toothache so engross all my inner man, as to put it out of my power even to write nonsense. However, as in duty bound, I approach my bookseller with an offering in my hand—a few poetic clinches and a song:—to expect any other kind of offering from the rhyming tribe would be to know them much less than you do. I do not pretend that there is much merit in these *morceaux*, but I have two reasons for sending

<sup>1</sup> Creech to Mr Cadell, Strand, London, March 7, 1789: ‘How do you stand with regard to Burns's Poems? The author has given me several beautiful new things for a new edition. Let me know if I may put a new edition to press here, and what number may be printed.’—*MS. in possession of Robert Cole, Esq.*

them—*primo*, they are mostly ill-natured, so are in unison with my present feelings, while fifty troops of infernal spirits are driving post from ear to ear along my jawbones; and, *secondly*, they are so short that you cannot leave off in the middle, and so hurt my pride in the idea that you found any work of mine too heavy to get through.

I have a request to beg of you, and I not only beg of you, but conjure you, by all your wishes and by all your hopes, that the Muse will spare the satiric wink in the moment of your foibles; that she will warble the song of rapture round your hymeneal couch; and that she will shed on your turf the honest tear of elegiac gratitude! Grant my request as speedily as possible: send me by the very first fly or coach for this place three copies of the last edition of my poems, which place to my account.

Now may the good things of prose, and the good things of verse, come among thy hands, until they be filled with the *good things of this life*, prayeth  
R. B.

The sufferings of the poet from the ailment alluded to in the above letter drew from him at this time his—

#### ADDRESS TO THE TOOTHACHE.

My curse upon thy venom'd stang,  
That shoots my tortur'd gums along;  
And through my lugs gies mony a twang,  
Wi' gnawing vengeance;  
Tearing my nerves wi' bitter pang,  
Like racking engines!

When fevers burn, or ague freezes,  
Rheumatics gnaw, or cholic squeezes;  
Our neighbour's sympathy may ease us,  
Wi' pitying moan;  
But thee—thou hell o' a' diseases,  
Aye mocks our groan!

Adown my beard the slavers trickle!  
I kick the wee stools o'er the mickle,  
As round the fire the gidgets keckle,  
To see me loup;  
While, raving mad, I wish a heckle  
Were in their doup.

O' a' the num'rous human dools,  
Ill har'ets, daft bargains, cutty-stools,  
Or worthy friends rak'd i' the mools,  
Sad sight to see!  
The tricks o' knaves, or fash o' fools—  
Thou bear'st the gree.

sorrow

cloud

trouble

superiority

Where'er that place be priests ca' hell,  
 Whence a' the tones o' misery yell,  
 And ranked plagues their numbers tell,  
     In dreadfu' raw,  
 Thou, Toothache, surely bear'st the bell  
     Amang them a'!

O thou grim mischief-making chiel,  
 That gars the notes of discord squeel,  
 Till daft mankind aft dance a reel  
     In gore a shoe-thick!—  
 Gle a' the faes o' Scotland's weal  
     A towmond's toothache!

year

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TO MR M'AULEY, OF DUMBARTON.

ELLISLAND, 4th June 1789.

DEAR SIR—Though I am not without my fears respecting my fate at that grand, universal inquest of right and wrong, commonly called *The Last Day*, yet I trust there is one sin which that arch-vagabond Satan—who, I understand, is to be king's evidence—cannot throw in my teeth; I mean ingratitude. There is a certain pretty large quantum of kindness for which I remain, and from inability I fear must still remain, your debtor; but though unable to repay the debt, I assure you, sir, I shall ever warmly remember the obligation. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to hear by my old acquaintance, Mr Kennedy, that you are, in immortal Allan's language, 'Hale, and weel, and living;' and that your charming family are well, and promising to be an amiable and respectable addition to the company of performers whom the Great Manager of the Drama of Man is bringing into action for the succeeding age.

With respect to my welfare, a subject in which you once warmly and effectively interested yourself—I am here in my old way, holding my plough, marking the growth of my corn, or the health of my dairy, and at times sauntering by the delightful windings of the Nith—on the margin of which I have built my humble domicile—praying for seasonable weather, or holding an intrigue with the Muses, the only gipsies with whom I have now any intercourse. As I am entered into the holy state of matrimony, I trust my face is turned completely Zion-ward; and as it is a rule with all honest fellows to repeat no grievances, I hope that the little poetic licences of former days will of course fall under the oblivious influence of some good-natured statute of celestial prescription. In my family devotion—which, like a good Presbyterian, I occasionally give to my household folks—I am extremely fond of the psalm, 'Let not the errors of my youth,' &c. and that other, 'Lo, children are God's heritage,' &c. in which last Mrs Burns—who, by the by, has a glorious 'wood-note wild' at either old song or psalmody—joins me with the pathos of Handel's Messiah.

R. B.



Robert Ainslie used to relate that Burns often quoted with great relish the verses from the 127th psalm in the Scottish translation :

Lo, children are God's heritage,  
The womb's fruit his reward :  
The sons of youth as arrows are,  
For strong men's hands prepared.  
O happy is the man that hath  
His quiver filled with those  
They unashamed in the gate  
Shall speak unto their foes.

The rough, antique force of these verses, and the cheerful view which they give of the natural character of that which modern society has perverted into an encumbrance—were what made them favourites with the bard. Mr Ainslie used to add, that a young companion of his, who afterwards became a judge under the name of Lord Cringletie, added greatly to the amusement of a mirthful company before which Burns had one evening repeated them, when, with great simplicity, he praised them as verses of the bard's own composition.

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TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, 8th June 1793.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I am perfectly ashamed of myself when I look at the date of your last. It is not that I forget the friend of my heart and the companion of my peregrinations, but I have been condemned to drudgery beyond sufferance, though not, thank God, beyond redemption. I have had a collection of poems by a lady put into my hands to prepare them for the press; which horrid task, with sowing corn with my own hand, a parcel of masons, wrights, plasterers, &c. to attend to, roaming on business through Ayrshire—all this was against me, and the very first dreadful article was of itself too much for me.

13th.—I have not had a moment to spare from incessant toil since the 8th. Life, my dear sir, is a serious matter. You know by experience that a man's individual self is a good deal; but, believe me, a wife and family of children, whenever you have the honour to be a husband and a father, will shew you that your present and most anxious hours of solitude are spent on trifles. The welfare of those who are very dear to us, whose only support, hope, and stay we are—this to a generous mind is another sort of more important object of care than any concerns whatever which centre merely in the individual. On the other hand, let no young, unmarried, rake-helly dog among you make a song of his pretended liberty and

freedom from care. If the relations we stand in to king, country, kindred, and friends, be anything but the visionary fancies of dreaming metaphysicians; if religion, virtue, magnanimity, generosity, humanity, and justice be aught but empty sounds; then the man who may be said to live only for others, for the beloved, honourable female, whose tender, faithful embrace endears life, and for the helpless little innocents who are to be the men and women, the worshippers of his God, the subjects of his king, and the support, nay, the very vital existence, of his COUNTRY, in the ensuing age—compare such a man with any fellow whatever, who, whether he bustle and push in business among labourers, clerks, statesmen; or whether he roar and rant, and drink and sing in taverns—a fellow over whose grave no one will breathe a single heigh-ho, except from the cobweb-tie of what is called good-fellowship—who has no view nor aim but what terminates in himself—if there be any grovelling, earthborn wretch of our species, a renegade to common sense, who would fain believe that the noble creature man is no better than a sort of fungus, generated out of nothing, nobody knows how, and soon dissipating in nothing, nobody knows where—such a stupid beast, such a crawling reptile, might balance the foregoing unexaggerated comparison, but no one else would have the patience.

Forgive me, my dear sir, for this long silence. *To make you amends* I shall send you soon, and, more encouraging still, without any postage, one or two rhymes of my later manufacture. R. B.

While residing at Ellisland, Burns with his family attended worship at Dunscore church, three or four miles distant among the hills. The minister, Mr Kirkpatrick, was a zealous Calvinist, and therefore not a favourite with our poet. Burns seems to have listened to his doctrines under a constant mental protest.

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TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 21st June 1789.

DEAR MADAM—Will you take the effusions, the miserable effusions of low spirits just as they flow from their bitter spring? I know not of any particular cause for this worst of all my foes besetting me; but for some time my soul has been beclouded with a thickening atmosphere of evil imaginations and gloomy presages.

*Monday Evening.*

I have just heard Mr Kirkpatrick preach a sermon. He is a man famous for his benevolence, and I revere him; but from such ideas of my Creator, good Lord, deliver me! Religion, my honoured friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensible Great Being, to whom I owe my existence, and that he must

be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature which he has made—these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and consequently that I am an accountable creature; that from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave—must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm that from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of his doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though, to *appearance* he himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species—therefore Jesus Christ was from God.

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.

What think you, madam, of my creed? I trust that I have said nothing that will lessen me in the eye of one whose good opinion I value almost next to the approbation of my own mind, R. B.

Helen Maria Williams, who had been introduced to Burns by Dr Moore, sent him, in June 1787, a letter enclosing some poems which that gentleman had addressed to herself. She told Burns that, her mother being a Scotchwoman, she had been competent to understand the language of the Ayrshire bard, 'had read his poems with satisfaction, and shared the triumph of his country in producing his laurels.' She afterwards sent him a poem of her own on the slave-trade.

#### TO MISS WILLIAMS.

ELLISLAND [August] 1789.

MADAM—Of the many problems in the nature of that wonderful creature, man, this is one of the most extraordinary, that he shall go on from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, or perhaps from year to year, suffering a hundred times more in an hour from the impotent consciousness of neglecting what he ought to do, than the very doing of it would cost him. I am deeply indebted to you, first for a most elegant poetic compliment; then for a polite, obliging letter; and, lastly, for your excellent poem on the slave-trade; and yet, wretch that I am! though the debts were debts of honour, and the creditor a lady, I have put off and put off even the very acknowledgment of the obligation, until you must indeed be the very angel I take you for if you can forgive me.

Your poem I have read with the highest pleasure. I have a way whenever I read a book—I mean a book in our own trade, madam, a poetic one—and when it is my own property, that I take a pencil

and mark at the ends of verses, or note on margins and odd paper, little criticisms of approbation or disapprobation as I peruse along. I will make no apology for presenting you with a few unconnected thoughts that occurred to me in my repeated perusals of your poem. I want to shew you that I have honesty enough to tell you what I take to be truths, even when they are not quite on the side of approbation; and I do it in the firm faith that you have equal greatness of mind to hear them with pleasure.

I know very little of scientific criticism; so all I can pretend to in that intricate art is merely to note, as I read along, what passages strike me as being uncommonly beautiful, and where the expression seems to be perplexed or faulty.

The poem opens finely. There are none of those idle prefatory lines which one may skip over before one comes to the subject. Verses 9th and 10th in particular—

Where ocean's unseen bound  
Leaves a drear world of waters round—

are truly beautiful. The simile of the hurricane is likewise fine, and indeed, beautiful as the poem is, almost all the similes rise decidedly above it. From verse 31st to verse 50th is a pretty eulogy on Britain. Verse 36th, 'That foul drama deep with wrong,' is nobly expressive. Verse 46th, I am afraid, is rather unworthy of the rest; 'to dare to feel' is an idea that I do not altogether like. The contrast of valour and mercy, from the 46th verse to the 50th, is admirable.

Either my apprehension is dull, or there is something a little confused in the apostrophe to Mr Pitt. Verse 55th is the antecedent to verses 57th and 58th, but in verse 58th the connection seems ungrammatical:—

Powers       \*       \*       \*       \*  
\*       \*       \*       \*  
With no gradations marked their flight,  
But rose at once to glory's height.

Ris'n should be the word instead of rose. Try it in prose. Powers—their flight marked by no gradations, but [the same powers] risen at once to the height of glory. Likewise verse 53d, 'For this,' is evidently meant to lead on the sense of the verses 59th, 60th, 61st, and 62d; but let us try how the thread of connection runs—

For this       \*       \*       \*  
\*       \*       \*       \*  
The deeds of mercy, that embrace  
A distant sphere, an alien race,  
Shall virtue's lips record, and claim  
The fairest honours of thy name.

I beg pardon if I misapprehend the matter, but this appears to

me the only imperfect passage in the poem. The comparison of the sunbeam is fine.

The compliment to the Duke of Richmond is, I hope, as just as it is certainly elegant. The thought,

Virtue       \*       \*       \*  
               \*       \*       \*       \*  
 Sends from her unsullied source,  
 The gems of thought their purest force,

is exceeding beautiful. The idea, from verse 81st to the 85th, that the 'blest decree' is like the beams of morning ushering in the glorious day of liberty, ought not to pass unnoticed or unapplauded. From verse 85th to verse 108th, is an animated contrast between the unfeeling selfishness of the oppressor on the one hand, and the misery of the captive on the other. Verse 88th might perhaps be amended thus: 'Nor ever *quit* her narrow maze.' We are said to *pass* a bound, but we *quit* a maze. Verse 100th is exquisitely beautiful—

They, whom wasted blessings tire.

Verse 110th is, I doubt, a clashing of metaphors; 'to load a span' is, I am afraid, an unwarrantable expression. In verse 114th, 'Cast the universe in shade,' is a fine idea. From the 115th verse to the 142d is a striking description of the wrongs of the poor African. Verse 120th, 'The load of unremitted pain,' is a remarkable, strong expression. The address to the advocates for abolishing the slave-trade, from verse 143d to verse 208th, is animated with the true life of genius. The picture of oppression—

While she links her impious chain,  
 And calculates the price of pain;  
 Weighs agony in sordid scales,  
 And marks if life or death prevails—

is nobly executed.

What a tender idea is in verse 180th! Indeed that whole description of home may vie with Thomson's description of home, somewhere in the beginning of his *Autumn*. I do not remember to have seen a stronger expression of misery than is contained in these verses—

Condemned, severe extreme, to live  
 When all is fled that life can give.

The comparison of our distant joys to distant objects is equally original and striking.

The character and manners of the dealer in the infernal traffic is a well done, though a horrid picture. I am not sure how far introducing the sailor was right; for though the sailor's common characteristic is generosity, yet in this case he is certainly not only an unconcerned witness, but in some degree an efficient agent in

the business. Verse 224th is a nervous . . . expressive—'The heart convulsive anguish breaks.' The description of the captive wretch when he arrives in the West Indies is carried on with equal spirit. The thought that the oppressor's sorrow on seeing the slave pine, is like the butcher's regret when his destined lamb dies a natural death, is exceedingly fine.

I am got so much into the cant of criticism, that I begin to be afraid lest I have nothing except the cant of it; and instead of elucidating my author, am only benighting myself. For this reason, I will not pretend to go through the whole poem. Some few remaining beautiful lines, however, I cannot pass over. Verse 280th is the strongest description of selfishness I ever saw. The comparison in verses 285th and 286th is new and fine; and the line, 'Your arms to penury you lend,' is excellent.

In verse 317th, 'like' should certainly be 'as' or 'so;' for instance—

His sway the hardened bosom leads  
To cruelty's remorseless deeds:  
As (or, so) the blue lightning when it springs  
With fury on its livid wings,  
Darts on the goal with rapid force,  
Nor heeds that ruin marks its course.

If you insert the word 'like' where I have placed 'as' you must alter 'darts' to 'darting,' and 'heeds' to 'heeding,' in order to make it grammar. A tempest is a favourite subject with the poets, but I do not remember anything, even in Thomson's *Winter*, superior to your verses from the 347th to the 351st. Indeed, the last simile, beginning with 'Fancy may dress,' &c. and ending with the 350th verse, is, in my opinion, the most beautiful passage in the poem; it would do honour to the greatest names that ever graced our profession.

I will not beg your pardon, madam, for these strictures, as my conscience tells me that for once in my life I have acted up to the duties of a Christian, in doing as I would be done by.

I had lately the honour of a letter from Dr Moore, where he tells me that he has sent me some books; they are not yet come to hand, but I hear they are on the way.

Wishing you all success in your progress in the path of fame, and that you may equally escape the danger of stumbling through incautious speed, or losing ground through loitering neglect. I am, &c.

R. B.

To the above letter the following is Miss Williams's answer:—

7th August 1789.

DEAR SIR—I do not lose a moment in returning you my sincere acknowledgments for your letter, and your criticism on my poem, which is a very flattering proof that you have read it with attention. I think your objections are perfectly just, except in one instance.

You have indeed been very profuse of panegyric on my little performance. A much less portion of applause from *you* would have been gratifying to me, since I think its value depends entirely upon the source from whence it proceeds—the incense of praise, like other incense, is more grateful from the quality than the quantity of the odour.

I hope you still cultivate the pleasures of poetry, which are precious even independent of the rewards of fame. Perhaps the most valuable property of poetry is its power of disengaging the mind from worldly cares, and leading the imagination to the richest springs of intellectual enjoyment; since, however frequently life may be chequered with gloomy scenes, those who truly love the Muse can always find one little path adorned with flowers and cheered by sunshine.

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TO MR JOHN LOGAN.<sup>1</sup>

ELLISLAND, near Dumfries, 7th Aug. 1789.

DEAR SIR—I intended to have written you long ere now, and as I told you I had gotten three stanzas and a half on my way in a poetic epistle to you; but that old enemy of all *good works*, the devil, threw me into a prosaic mire, and for the soul of me I cannot get out of it. I dare not write you a long letter, as I am going to intrude on your time with a long ballad. I have, as you will shortly see, finished ‘The Kirk’s Alarm;’ but, now that it is done, and that I have laughed once or twice at the conceits in some of the stanzas, I am determined not to let it get into the public; so I send you this copy, the first that I have sent to Ayrshire, except some few of the stanzas which I wrote off in embryo for Gavin Hamilton, under the express provision and request that you will only read it to a few of us, and do not on any account give or permit to be taken any copy of the ballad. If I could be of any service to Dr M’Gill I would do it, though it should be at a much greater expense than irritating a few bigoted priests; but I am afraid serving him in his present *embarras* is a task too hard for me. I have enemies enow, God knows, though I do not wantonly add to the number. Still, as I think there is some merit in two or three of the thoughts, I send it to you as a small, but sincere testimony how much, and with what respectful esteem, I am, dear sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

The poem alluded to in this letter was a satire evoked by an ecclesiastical case in which Burns’s heterodox tendencies and personal friendships were deeply interested. Dr William M’Gill, one of the two ministers conjoined in the parochial charge of

<sup>1</sup> Of Knockshinnoch, in Glen Afton, Ayrshire.

Ayr, had published in 1786, *A Practical Essay on the Death of Jesus Christ, in Two Parts; containing, 1, the History, 2, the Doctrine of his Death*, which was supposed to inculcate principles of both Arian and Socinian character, and provoked many severe censures from the more rigid party of the church. M'Gill remained silent under the attacks of his opponents, till Dr William Peebles of Newton-upon-Ayr, a neighbour, and hitherto a friend, in preaching a centenary sermon on the Revolution, November 5, 1788, denounced the essay as heretical, and the author as one who 'with one hand received the privileges of the church, while with the other he was endeavouring to plunge the keenest poniard into her heart.' M'Gill published a defence, which led, in April 1789, to the introduction of the case into the presbyterial court of Ayr, and subsequently into that of the synod of Glasgow and Ayr. Meanwhile, the public out of doors was agitating the question with the keenest interest, and the strife of the liberal and zealous parties in the church had reached a painful extreme. It was now that Burns took up the pen in behalf of M'Gill, whom he looked on as a worthy and enlightened person suffering an unworthy persecution.

## THE KIRK'S ALARM.

Orthodox, orthodox,  
 Wha believe in John Knox,  
 Let me sound an alarm to your conscience;  
 There's a heretic blast  
 Has been blawn in the wast,  
 That what is not sense must be nonsense.

Dr Mac,<sup>1</sup> Dr Mac,  
 You should stretch on a rack,  
 To strike evil doers wi' terror;  
 To join faith and sense  
 Upon any pretence  
 Is heretic, damnable error.

<sup>1</sup> Dr M'Gill. The essay published by this reverend gentleman is described by one of his surviving friends as a work of considerable ability. He was a Socinian in principle, though not a disciple of Socinus, none of whose works he had ever read. In his personal and domestic character he was a strange mixture of simplicity and stoicism. He seldom smiled, but often set the table in a roar by his quaint remarks. He was inflexibly regular in the distribution of his time: he studied so much every day, and took his walk at the same hour in all kinds of weather. He played at golf a whole twelvemonth without the omission of a single week-day, except the three on which there are religious services at the time of the communion. His views of many of the dispensations of Providence were widely different from those of the bulk of society. A friend told him of an old clergyman, an early companion of his own, who, having entered the pulpit in his canonicals, and being about to commence service, fell back and expired in a moment. Dr M'Gill clapped his hands together, and said: 'That was very desirable; he lived all the days of his



Town of Ayr, town of Ayr,<sup>1</sup>  
 'T was mad, I declare,  
 To meddle wi' mischief a-brewing;  
 Provost John<sup>2</sup> is still deaf  
 To the church's relief,  
 And orator Bob<sup>3</sup> is its ruin.

D'rymple mild,<sup>4</sup> D'rymple mild,  
 Though your heart's like a child,  
 And your life like the new-driven snaw;  
 Yet that winna save ye,  
 Auld Satan must have ye,  
 For preaching that three's ane and twa.

Rumble John,<sup>5</sup> Rumble John,  
 Mount the steps wi' a groan,  
 Cry, the book is wi' heresy crammed;  
 Then lug out your ladle,  
 Deal brimstone like adle,                      muck-water  
 And roar every note of the damned.

life.' The morning after a domestic calamity of the most harrowing kind, the reverend doctor, to the surprise of his flock, officiated in church with his usual serenity. He conversed on self-murder with the coolness of a Roman philosopher. One day, when he was in his study examining a huge folio, with his back to the door, and only the writer of these notes in his presence, a stranger suddenly walked in—a singular being named Macrae, who had written a translation of the Bible, and now wandered through the country as an interpreter of dreams. Without preface or introduction the intruder exclaimed: 'Dr M'Gill, I'm a phenomenon!' The doctor looked round, and the expression of the countenances of the two originals would have formed a subject for the pencil of Hogarth.

<sup>1</sup> When Dr M'Gill's case first came before the synod, the magistrates of Ayr published an advertisement in the newspapers, bearing a warm testimony to the excellence of the defender's character, and their appreciation of his services as a pastor.

<sup>2</sup> John Ballantyne, Esq., banker, provost of Ayr, the prime mover, probably, in the testimony in favour of Dr M'Gill—the same individual to whom the *Two Brigs* is dedicated. There could not have been a nobler instance of true benevolence and manly worth than that furnished by Provost Ballantyne. His hospitable mansion was known far and wide, and he was the friend of every liberal measure. At an election for the Ayr district of burghs, the delegate for Campbeltown being detained by stormy weather, the Ayr electors, who had the casting vote, were disposed to nominate their provost; but Mr Ballantyne disdained taking advantage of an accident, and caused the vote to be given for the person whom the Campbeltown delegate was known to favour.

<sup>3</sup> Mr Robert Aiken, writer in Ayr, to whom the *Cotter's Saturday Night* is inscribed. He exerted his powerful oratorical talents as agent for M'Gill in the presbytery and synod.

<sup>4</sup> The Rev. Dr William Dalrymple, senior minister of the collegiate charge of Ayr—a man of extraordinary benevolence and worth. It is related that, one day meeting an almost naked beggar in the country, he took off his coat and waistcoat, gave the latter to the poor man, then put on his coat, buttoned it up, and walked home. He died in 1814, after having fulfilled his duties for sixty-eight years. If we are to believe the poet, his views respecting the Trinity had not been strictly orthodox.

<sup>5</sup> The Rev. John Russell, celebrated in the *Holy Fair*.

Simper James,<sup>1</sup> Simper James,  
 Leave the fair Killie dames,  
 There's a holier chase in your view ;  
 I'll lay on your head,  
 That the pack ye'll soon lead,  
 For puppies like you there's but few.

Singet Sawney,<sup>2</sup> Singet Sawney,  
 Are ye huirding the penny,  
 Unconscious what evils await ;  
 Wi' a jump, yell, and howl,  
 Alarm every soul,  
 For the foul thief is just at your gate.

Daddy Auld,<sup>3</sup> Daddy Auld,  
 There's a tod in the fauld, fox  
 A tod meikle waur than the clerk ;<sup>4</sup>  
 Though ye downa do skaith, cannot harm  
 Ye'll be in at the death,  
 And if ye canna bite, ye may bark.

Davie Bluster,<sup>5</sup> Davie Bluster,  
 For a saint if ye muster,  
 The corps is no nice of recruits ;  
 Yet to worth let's be just,  
 Royal blood ye might boast,  
 If the ass was the king of the brutes.

Jamy Goose,<sup>6</sup> Jamy Goose,  
 Ye hae made but toom roose, empty praise  
 In hunting the wicked lieutenant ;  
 But the Doctor's your mark,  
 For the L—d's haly ark,  
 He has cooper'd and cawt a wrong pin in't.

Poet Willie,<sup>7</sup> Poet Willie,  
 Gie the Doctor a volley,

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. James Mackinlay, minister of Kilmarnock, the hero of the *Ordination*.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. Mr Alexander Moodie, of Riccarton, one of the heroes of the *Two Herds*.

<sup>3</sup> The Rev. Mr Auld, of Manachline.

<sup>4</sup> The clerk was Mr Gavin Hamilton, whose defence against the charges preferred by Mr Auld, as elsewhere stated, had occasioned much trouble to this clergyman.

<sup>5</sup> Mr Grant, Ochiltree.

<sup>6</sup> Mr Young, Cumnock.

<sup>7</sup> The Rev. Dr Peebles. He had excited some ridicule by a line in a poem on the Centenary of the Revolution :

' And bound in *Liberty's* endearing chain.'

The poetry of this gentleman is said to have been indifferent. He attempted wit in private conversation with no better success.

Wi' your 'Liberty's Chain' and your wit;  
 O'er Pegasus' side  
 Ye ne'er laid a stride,  
 Ye but smelt, man, the place where he —.

Andro Gouk,<sup>1</sup> Andro Gouk,  
 Ye may slander the book,  
 And the book not the waur, let me tell ye;  
 Ye are rich, and look big,  
 But lay by hat and wig,  
 And ye'll hae a calf's head o' sma' value.

Barr Steenie,<sup>2</sup> Barr Steenie,  
 What mean ye—what mean ye?  
 If ye'll meddle nae mair wi' the matter,  
 Ye may hae some pretence  
 To havins and sense, manners  
 Wi' people wha ken ye nae better.

Irvine-side,<sup>3</sup> Irvine-side,  
 Wi' your turkey-cock pride,  
 Of manhood but sma' is your share;  
 Ye've the figure, 'tis true,  
 Even your faes will allow,  
 And your friends they dare grant you nae mair.

Muirland Jock,<sup>4</sup> Muirland Jock,  
 Whom the L—d made a rock  
 To crush Common Sense for her sins,  
 If ill manners were wit,  
 There's no mortal so fit  
 To confound the poor Doctor at ance.

Holy Will,<sup>5</sup> Holy Will,  
 There was wit i' your skull,

<sup>1</sup> Dr Andrew Mitchell, Monkton. Extreme love of money, and a strange confusion of ideas, characterised this presbyter. In his prayer for the royal family, he would express himself thus: 'Bless the King—his Majesty the Queen—her Majesty the Prince of Wales.' The word chemistry he pronounced in three different ways—hemistry, shemistry, and tchemistry—but never by any chance in the right way. Notwithstanding the antipathy he could scarcely help feeling towards Burns, one of the poet's comic verses would make him laugh heartily, and confess that, 'after all, he was a droll fellow.'

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Stephen Young, Barr.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. George Smith, Galston. This gentleman is praised as friendly to Common Sense in the *Holy Fair*. The offence which was taken at that praise probably embittered the poet against him.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. John Shepherd, Muirkirk. The statistical account of Muirkirk contributed by this gentleman to Sir John Sinclair's work, is above the average in intelligence and very agreeably written. He had, however, an unfortunate habit of saying rude things, which he mistook for wit, and thus laid himself open to Burns's satire.

<sup>5</sup> The elder, William Fisher, whom Burns had formerly scourged.

When ye pilfered the alms o' the poor ;  
 The timmer is scant,  
 When ye're ta'en for a saunt,  
 Wha should swing in a rape for an hour.

Calvin's sons, Calvin's sons,  
 Seize your spir'tual guns,  
 Ammunition you never can need ;  
 Your hearts are the stuff,  
 Will be powther enough,  
 And your skulls are storehouses o' lead.

Poet Burns, Poet Burns,  
 Wi' your priest-skelping turns,  
 Why desert ye your auld native shire ?  
 Though your Muse is a gipsy,  
 Yet were she e'en tipsy,  
 She could ca' us nae waur than we are.<sup>1</sup>

It may be added that the war raged, till, in April 1790, the case came on for trial before the synod, when M'Gill stopped farther procedure by giving in a document expressive of his deep regret for the disquiet he had occasioned, explaining the challenged passages of his book, and declaring his adherence to the standards of the church on the points of doctrine in question.<sup>2</sup>

Burns seems not to have entered upon his new house at Ellisland till the year 1789 was somewhat advanced, for he addressed letters to his brother William in March, dating from the Isle. Elizabeth Smith remembers the removal from that narrow tenement to the better accommodations of Ellisland, though she cannot be precise about the time. Burns came to her, and with a slight smile on his face desired her to take the family Bible and a bowl of salt, and placing the one upon the other, carry them to the new

<sup>1</sup> In the present version of this poem advantage is taken of a few various readings from a copy published by Allan Cunningham, in which there is a curious repetition of the last line of each verse, along with the name of the party addressed. A specimen of this arrangement is given in the following additional stanza, from Allan's copy:—

Afton's laird, Afton's laird,  
 When your pen can be spared,  
 A copy of this I bequeath  
 On the same sicker score,  
 As I mentioned before,  
 To that trusty auld worthy, Clackleith,  
 Afton's laird ;  
 To that trusty auld worthy, Clackleith.

<sup>2</sup> Dr M'Gill died March 30, 1807, at the age of seventy-six, and in the forty-sixth year of his ministry. The account of the controversy here given is abridged from *Murray's Literary History of Galloway*. The notes on the clergymen are from a living member of their profession (1851), who officiated in Ayrshire at a time not long subsequent to the period of the poem.

house, and walk into it before any other person. This was the old *freit* appropriate to the taking possession of a new house, the object being to secure good-luck for all who should tenant it. The poet, like a man of imagination, delighted in such ancient observances, albeit his understanding on a rigid tasking would have denied their conclusions. He himself, with his wife on his arm, followed little Betty, the Bible and salt, and so entered upon the possession of what was comparatively to him the Great Babylon which he had built.

On the 18th of August his spouse brought him an infant, whom he named Francis Wallace, in honour of Mrs Dunlop. Seeing his family thus extending, and perhaps not greatly in heart about the second year's crop of his farm, he about this time applied to Mr Graham of Fintry to be nominated Excise-officer of the rural district in which he lived. He took this step entirely as a prudential one, calculating on being a gainer by it to an extent not much less than forty pounds a year, which he thought a most desirable addition to the profits of his farm. According to Allan Cunningham, who had opportunities of being well informed about the Ellisland period of Burns's life, he contemplated devoting his farm chiefly to the business of the dairy. His sisters were skilled in this branch of rural economy, and had imparted their knowledge as far as possible to Mrs Burns. He thought that, while Jean, with the assistance of some of her west-country sisterhood, managed the cows and their produce, he himself might go on with the Excise business, and still have a sufficiency of time for the reduced duties connected with Ellisland which were then left to himself. Thus both ways money would be coming in. It was a good and plausible plan; but, as Mr Cunningham observes—

‘The best-laid schemes o’ mice and men  
Gang aft agley.’

The poet, however, deserves credit for his good intention, and for the castigation of spirit to which he must have submitted on the occasion.

‘Searching auld wives’ barrels,  
Och, hon! the day!  
That clarty barm should stain my laurels;     dirty yeast  
But—what’ll ye say!  
These movin’ things ca’d wives and weans,     children  
Wad move the very hearts o’ stanes!’

So he had extemporaneously sung on getting his appointment. The verse shews the motive, and does the poet honour.

We have seen that Burns sent his protest against Mr Kirkpatrick's revolution-sermon to the editor of the *Star*, a London

evening paper. He had more recently transmitted to the same quarter *Delia, an Ode*, and now he appears to have proposed to the editor something like a regular correspondence. Dr Currie preserved some degree of mystery regarding both the paper and the editor; and it was not without considerable difficulty that the present biographer obtained light respecting both. As already mentioned, the editor was Mr Peter Stuart, long after known by his connection in succession with the *Morning Post* and the *Oracle*. In the Anti-Gallican position then assumed by this gentleman, we may discern one sufficient reason for the suppression of his name by Currie. His letter is valuable for the testimony it bears to the fascinating social character of the lamented Robert Fergusson, who had been a schoolfellow and companion of his elder brother Charles, now a dramatic writer of some temporary fame. Mr Daniel Stuart, a younger brother, and the most notable man of the three, was the employer of Mr Coleridge in the *Morning Post*, and a most generous friend towards that extraordinary person during many subsequent years.

[TO MR ROBERT BURNS.]

LONDON, 5th August 1789.

MY DEAR SIR—Excuse me when I say, that the uncommon abilities which you possess must render your correspondence very acceptable to any one. I can assure you I am particularly proud of your partiality, and shall endeavour, by every method in my power, to merit a continuance of your politeness. \* \*

When you can spare a few moments, I should be proud of a letter from you, directed for me, Gerard Street, Soho. \* \*

I cannot express my happiness sufficiently at the instance of your attachment to my late inestimable friend, Bob Fergusson,<sup>1</sup> who was particularly intimate with myself and relations. While I recollect with pleasure his extraordinary talents and many amiable qualities, it affords me the greatest consolation that I am honoured with the correspondence of his successor in natural simplicity and genius. That Mr Burns has refined in the art of poetry, must readily be admitted; but notwithstanding many favourable representations, I am yet to learn that he inherits his convivial powers.

There was such a richness of conversation, such a plenitude of fancy and attraction in him, that when I call the happy period of our intercourse to my memory, I feel myself in a state of delirium. I was then younger than he by eight or ten years, but his manner was so felicitous, that he enraptured every person around him, and infused into the hearts of the young and old the spirit and animation which operated on his own mind—I am, dear sir, yours, &c.

<sup>1</sup> The erection of a monument to him.

TO MR. [PETER STUART.]

[September] 1793.

MY DEAR SIR—The hurry of a farmer in this particular season, and the indolence of a poet at all times and seasons, will, I hope, plead my excuse for neglecting so long to answer your obliging letter of the 5th of August.

That you have done well in quitting your laborious concern in \* \* I do not doubt; the weighty reasons you mention were, I hope very, and deservedly indeed, weighty ones, and your health is a matter of the last importance; but whether the remaining proprietors of the paper have also done well, is what I much doubt. The [*Star*], so far as I was a reader, exhibited such a brilliancy of point, such an elegance of paragraph, and such a variety of intelligence, that I can hardly conceive it possible to continue a daily paper in the same degree of excellence: but if there was a man who had abilities equal to the task, that man's assistance the proprietors have lost.

When I received your letter, I was transcribing for [*the Star*] my letter to the magistrates of the Canongate, Edinburgh, begging their permission to place a tombstone over poor Fergusson, and their edict in consequence of my petition; but now I shall send them to — Poor Fergusson! If there be a life beyond the grave, which I trust there is; and if there be a good God presiding over all nature, which I am sure there is—thou art now enjoying existence in a glorious world, where worth of the heart alone is distinction in the man; where riches, deprived of all their pleasure-purchasing powers, return to their native sordid matter; where titles and honours are the disregarded reveries of an idle dream; and where that heavy virtue, which is the negative consequence of steady dulness, and those thoughtless, though often destructive follies, which are the unavoidable aberrations of frail human nature, will be thrown into equal oblivion as if they had never been!

Adieu, my dear sir! So soon as your present views and schemes are concentrated in an aim, I shall be glad to hear from you, as your welfare and happiness is by no means a subject indifferent to, yours,  
R. B.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 6th Sept. 1793.

DEAR MADAM—I have mentioned in my last my appointment to the Excise, and the birth of little Frank; who, by the by, I trust will be no discredit to the honourable name of Wallace, as he has a fine manly countenance, and a figure that might do credit to a little

fellow two months older ; and likewise an excellent good temper, though when he pleases he has a pipe, only not quite so loud as the horn that his immortal namesake blew as a signal to take out the pin of Stirling bridge.<sup>1</sup>

I had some time ago an epistle, part poetic and part prosaic, from your poetess, Mrs J. Little, a very ingenious but modest composition. I should have written her as she requested, but for the hurry of this new business. I have heard of her and her compositions in this country, and, I am happy to add, always to the honour of her character. The fact is, I know not well how to write to her—I should sit down to a sheet of paper that I knew not how to stain. I am no dab at fine-drawn letter-writing ; and, except when prompted by friendship or gratitude, or, which happens extremely rarely, inspired by the Muse (I know not her name) that presides over epistolary writing, I sit down, when necessitated to write, as I would sit down to beat hemp.

Some parts of your letter of the 20th August struck me with the most melancholy concern for the state of your mind at present.

Would I could write you a letter of comfort, I would sit down to it with as much pleasure as I would to write an epic poem of my own composition, that should equal the *Iliad*. Religion, my dear friend, is the true comfort ! A strong persuasion in a future state of existence ; a proposition so obviously probable, that, setting revelation aside, every nation and people, so far as investigation has reached, for at least near four thousand years, have, in some mode or other, firmly believed it. In vain would we reason and pretend to doubt. I have myself done so to a very daring pitch ; but when I reflected that I was opposing the most ardent wishes, and the most darling hopes of good men, and flying in the face of all human belief, in all ages, I was shocked at my own conduct.

I know not whether I have ever sent you the following lines, or if you have ever seen them ; but it is one of my favourite quotations, which I keep constantly by me in my progress through life, in the language of the book of Job,

Against the day of battle and of war.

Spoken of religion :

'Tis *this*, my friend, that streaks our morning bright,  
'Tis *this* that gilds the horror of our night.  
When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few ;  
When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue ;

---

<sup>1</sup> ' Frae Jop the horn he hinted and couth blaw  
Sae asprely, and warn'd gude John Wright :  
The rowar out he strake with great sleight ;  
The lave gaed down, when the pin out gae.  
A hideous cry among the people raise ;  
Baith horse and men into the water fell,' &c.

—The Wallace, book vii. line 1172.



'Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart,  
 Disarms affliction, or repels his dart;  
 Within the breast bids purest raptures rise,  
 Bids smiling conscience spread her cloudless skies.\*

I have been busy with *Zeluco*. The doctor is so obliging as to request my opinion of it; and I have been revolving in my mind some kind of criticisms on novel-writing, but it is a depth beyond my research. I shall, however, digest my thoughts on the subject as well as I can. *Zeluco* is a most sterling performance.

Farewell! *A Dieu, le bon Dieu, je vous commende!*

We have to turn from this serious letter to two of the merriest affairs in which we have any record of Burns being concerned. The first was that which gave rise to his well-known song of *Willie brew'd a Peck o' Maut*. Burns's note upon that ditty gives its history. 'This air is [Allan] Masterton's; the song mine. The occasion of it was this: Mr William Nicol, of the High School, Edinburgh, during the autumn vacation being at Moffat, honest Allan—who was at that time on a visit to Dalswinton—and I went to pay Nicol a visit. We had such a joyous meeting, that Mr Masterton and I agreed, each in our own way, that we should celebrate the business.'

#### WILLIE BREWED A PECK O' MAUT.

O Willie brewed a peck o' maut,  
 And Rob and Allan cam to pree: taste  
 Three blither hearts that lee-lang night  
 Ye wad na find in Christendie.  
 We are na fou', we're nae that fou',  
 But just a drappie in our ee;  
 The cock may craw, the day may daw,  
 And aye we'll taste the barley bree.

Here are we met, three merry boys,  
 Three merry boys, I trow, are we;  
 And mony a night we've merry been,  
 And mony mae we hope to be!

It is the moon, I ken her horn,  
 That's blinkin' in the lift sae hie;  
 She shines sae bright to wile us hame,  
 But, by my sooth, she'll wait a wee!

Wha first shall rise to gang awa',  
 A cackold, coward loon is he!  
 Wha last beside his chair shall fa',<sup>1</sup>  
 He is the king amang us three!

<sup>1</sup> In Johnson's Museum—

'Wha first beside his chair shall fa'.

Evidently a mistake.

The date of this song is ascertained to be not later than the 16th October 1789, because in a letter of Burns of that date (*see onward*), he quotes two verses of it. As the vacation of the High School at that time extended from about the 13th August to the 25th of September, the date of the song may be ascertained as within that period of the year. A doubt, however, has arisen regarding the locality. Dr Currie stated that the meeting 'took place at Laggan, a farm purchased by Mr Nicol in Nithsdale, on the recommendation of Burns.' Allan Cunningham adopts this statement, gives Dunscore as the parochial situation of Laggan, and adds: 'It [the song] was composed to commemorate the *house-heating*, as entering upon possession of a new house is called in Scotland. William Nicol made the browst strong and nappy; and Allan Masterton, then on a visit at Dalswinton, *crossed the Nith*, and with the poet and his celebrated punch-bowl reached Laggan

"A wee before the sun gaed down."

The sun, however, rose on their carousal, if the tradition of the land may be trusted.'

It is true that Nicol purchased a small estate called Laggan, not in the parish of Dunscore, which was Burns's parish, but in the adjacent one of Glencairn, and about a mile and a half from Maxwelton House. But there is good evidence that he did not do so till the year following the composition of the song. We are furnished with a note of 'a disposition by William Riddell of Commieston, W. S., to William Nicol, one of the masters of the High School, Edinburgh, of the lands of Meikle and Little Laggan, lying in the barony of Snaid, parish of Glencairn, and shire of Dumfries, dated 26 March 1790, and registered in the books of council and session, 2 April 1790.'<sup>1</sup> It might be supposed possible that Nicol had obtained possession of his property before the date of the disposition, perhaps at the exchanging of missives of agreement, and that thus there might be a *house-heating* at Laggan in autumn 1789. But in a letter of Burns to Nicol, February 9, 1790 (*see onward*), there occurs the following passage:—'I hope Ned [Nicol's son] is a good scholar, and will come out to gather nuts with me next

<sup>1</sup> In an advertisement announcing the intended sale of parts of the estate of Maxwelton, which appears in an Edinburgh newspaper of 21st November 1786, 'Lot VII.' is composed of the lands of Craiglyrian, about 790 acres, whereof 17 are arable, and 'the lands of Meikle and Little Laggans, consisting of about 234 acres, whereof 69 are arable and 9 meadow-ground; the remainder is good pasture-land, and there is some wood upon these lands.' It is stated that the lands of this lot are let together under a current lease till 1797, at the annual rent of £121, 18s.

I have been informed that Nicol paid about £1500 for the Laggans.

harvest.' Burns would assuredly not have written precisely in this manner, if Nicol had by that time acquired a country residence for himself and his family within four or five miles of Ellisland, and as well provided with nuts as Ellisland itself. We therefore conclude that Burns's note upon the song is to be accepted as intimating Moffat as the scene of the meeting, and that the statements of Currie and Cunningham are mistakes.

A correspondent informs me that Nicol's mansion at Laggan consisted merely of *a but and a ben*—that is, a cottage of two rooms. It may be admitted as far from unlikely, that Nicol and Burns had many meetings there, *resembling* that celebrated in the song. The house is now in ruins, and passes by the name of *Nicol's Wa's*. There is a hazel-copse behind the place, where our friend used to gather nuts in his schoolboy days; so that most undoubtedly Ned was independent of the Ellisland coppices at the vacation of 1790 and thereafter.

Currie's note upon the song, written ten years after its composition, concludes with a sentence which says all that a generous moralist would desire to be said on the ultra-merry meeting described by the bard. 'These three honest fellows—all men of uncommon talents—are now all *under the turf*.'

The second affair alluded to was one in which some of the Nithsdale gentlemen of Burns's acquaintance were concerned. Our bard, in introducing the ballad composed on the occasion, gives the following traditional recital:—'In the train of Anne of Denmark, when she came to Scotland with our James VI., there came over also a Danish gentleman of gigantic stature and great prowess, and a matchless champion of Bacchus. He had a little ebony whistle, which at the commencement of the orgies he laid on the table, and whoever was the last able to blow it, everybody else being disabled by the potency of the bottle, was to carry off the whistle as a trophy of victory. The Dane produced credentials of his victories, without a single defeat, at the courts of Copenhagen, Stockholm, Moscow, Warsaw, and several of the petty courts in Germany; and challenged the Scots Bacchanalians to the alternative of trying his prowess, or else of acknowledging their inferiority. After many overthrows on the part of the Scots, the Dane was encountered by Sir Robert Lawrie of Maxwellton, ancestor of the present worthy baronet of that name; who, after three days and three nights' hard contest, left the Scandinavian under the table,

"And blew on the whistle his requiem shrill."

Sir Walter, son to Sir Robert before mentioned, afterwards lost

the whistle to Walter Riddel of Glenriddel, who had married a sister of Sir Walter's.<sup>1</sup>

The whistle being now in the possession of Captain Riddel, Burns's neighbour at Friars' Carse, it was resolved that he should submit it to an amicable contest, involving, besides himself, two other descendants of the conqueror of the Scandinavian—namely, Mr Fergusson of Craigdarroch, and Sir Robert Lawrie of Maxwellton, then M.P. for Dumfriesshire. The meeting was to take place at Friars' Carse on Friday the 16th of October, and Burns was invited to be present. The historical associations connected with the whistle would have been sure to excite an interest in the bosom of the poet: so magnificent a frolic captivated his imagination. We have the expression of this latter feeling in a letter which he addressed that day on a trivial piece of business—

TO CAPTAIN RIDDEL, CARSE.

ELLISLAND, 16th Oct. 1790.<sup>2</sup>

SIR—Big with the idea of this important day at Friars' Carse, I have watched the elements and skies in the full persuasion that they would announce it to the astonished world by some phenomena of terrific portent. Yesternight until a very late hour did I wait with anxious horror for the appearance of some comet firing half the sky; or aerial armies of sanguinary Scandinavians darting athwart the

<sup>1</sup> 'There are some odd blunders in the legend of the Whistle, which a pedigree of the Maxwellton family in my possession enables me to mention. There was no Sir Robert Lawrie of Maxwellton prior to or during the reign of James VI. Stephen, the third son of John Lawrie, the first of the family on record, and an inhabitant of Dumfries, purchased the lands of Maxwellton from the Earl of Glencairn in 1614. He was succeeded by his son John, who died in the year 1649; and his son and heir, Robert, was created a baronet on the 27th March 1685. By his second wife, Jean Riddel, daughter of the Laird of Minto, he had three sons and four daughters, of whom Catherine was married to Walter Riddel of Glenriddel, and Anne to Alexander Fergusson of Craigdarroch. His son Robert was killed, when a lad, by a fall from his horse in 1702. So the story of Queen Anne's drunken Dane may be regarded as a groundless fable, unless such a person came over in the train of Prince George of Denmark, the husband of our last Queen Anne, which is not very probable.'—*Charles K. Sharpe, in 2d edition of Johnson's Musical Museum* (1839), iv. 362. It is evidently, nevertheless, to the first baronet that the legend recorded by Burns refers, as his second successor was a son, Sir Walter, a contemporary of Walter Riddel of Glenriddel. The story had probably some such foundation as that described, though incorrectly stated as to time.

<sup>2</sup> Burns, in his notes on Scottish song, gives 'Friday, 16th October 1790,' as the date of the Whistle-contest. It is certainly a mistake as to the year. It will be admitted that he is less likely to have made a mistake in the date of a letter, than in a statement written at the distance of a few years. Besides, his date 'Friday, 16th October 1790,' carries error on its own face, for the 16th of October 1790 was not a Friday, though the 16th of October 1789 was. There exists a letter of Robert Ainslie to Mrs M<sup>rs</sup> Lehoue, dated Dumfries, 18th October 1790, in which he tells of having been for several days with Burns at Ellisland, but says nothing of a whistle-contest on the 16th.

startled heavens, rapid as the ragged lightning, and horrid as those convulsions of nature that bury nations.

The elements, however, seem to take the matter very quietly: they did not even usher in this morning with triple suns and a shower of blood, symbolical of the three potent heroes, and the mighty claret-shed of the day. For me, as Thomson in his *Winter* says of the storm—I shall ‘Hear astonished, and astonished sing.’

The whistle and the man I sing,  
The man that won the whistle, &c.

Here are we met, three merry boys,  
Three merry boys, I trow, are we;  
And mony a night we’ve merry been,  
And mony mae we hope to be!

Wha first shall rise to gang awa’,  
A cuckold, coward loon is he:  
Wha *last* beside his chair shall fa’,  
He is the king amang us three.

To leave the heights of Parnassus, and come to the humble vale of prose. I have some misgivings that I take too much upon me, when I request you to get your guest, Sir Robert Lawrie, to frank the two enclosed covers for me; the one of them to Sir William Cunningham of Robertland, Bart. at Kilmarnock—the other, to Mr Allan Masterton, writing-master, Edinburgh. The first has a kindred claim on Sir Robert, as being a brother baronet, and likewise a keen Foxite; the other is one of the worthiest men in the world, and a man of real genius; so, allow me to say, he has a fraternal claim on you. I want them franked for to-morrow, as I cannot get them to the post to-night. I shall send a servant again for them in the evening. Wishing that your head may be crowned with laurels to-night, and free from aches to-morrow, I have the honour to be, sir, your deeply indebted, humble servant, R. B.

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#### THE WHISTLE.

I sing of a whistle, a whistle of worth,  
I sing of a whistle, the pride of the North,  
Was brought to the court of our good Scottish king,  
And long with this whistle all Scotland shall ring.

Old Loda,<sup>1</sup> still rueing the arm of Fingal,  
The god of the bottle sends down from his hall—  
‘This whistle’s your challenge—to Scotland get o’er,  
And drink them to hell, sir! or ne’er see me more!’

<sup>1</sup> See Ossian’s Cario-thura.—B.

Old poets have sung, and old chronicles tell,  
What champions ventured, what champions fell;  
The son of great Loda was conqueror still,  
And blew on the whistle his requiem shrill.

Till Robert, the lord of the Cairn and the Skarr,<sup>1</sup>  
Unmatched at the bottle, unconquered in war,  
He drank his poor godship as deep as the sea—  
No tide of the Baltic e'er drunker than he.

Thus Robert, victorious, the trophy has gained,  
Which now in his house has for ages remained;  
Till three noble chieftains, and all of his blood,  
The jovial contest again have renewed.

Three joyous good fellows, with hearts clear of flaw:  
Craigdarroch, so famous for wit, worth, and law;  
And trusty Glenriddel, so skilled in old coins;  
And gallant Sir Robert, deep-read in old wines.

Craigdarroch began, with a tongue smooth as oil,  
Desiring Glenriddel to yield up the spoil;  
Or else he would muster the heads of the clan,  
And once more, in claret, try which was the man.

'By the gods of the ancients!' Glenriddel replies,  
'Before I surrender so glorious a prize,  
I'll conjure the ghost of the great Rorie More,<sup>2</sup>  
And bumper his horn with him twenty times o'er.'

Sir Robert, a soldier, no speech would pretend,  
But he ne'er turned his back on his foe—or his friend,  
Said, Toss down the whistle, the prize of the field,  
And knee-deep in claret, he'd die, or he'd yield.

To the board of Glenriddel our heroes repair,  
So noted for drowning of sorrow and care;  
But for wine and for welcome not more known to fame  
Than the sense, wit, and taste of a sweet lovely dame.

A bard was selected to witness the fray,  
And tell future ages the feats of the day;  
A bard who detested all sadness and spleen,  
And wished that Parnassus a vineyard had been.

<sup>1</sup> The Cairn, a stream in Glencairn parish, on which Maxwellton House is situated; the Skarr, a similar mountain-rill, in the parish of Penpont; both being affluents of the Nith.

<sup>2</sup> See Johnson's Tour to the Hebrides.—B.

The dinner being over, the claret they ply,  
And every new cork is a new spring of joy;  
In the bands of old friendship and kindred so set,  
And the bands grew the tighter the more they were wet.

Gay Pleasure ran riot as bumpers ran o'er;  
Bright Phœbus ne'er witnessed so joyous a core,  
And vowed that to leave them he was quite forlorn,  
Till Cynthia hinted he'd see them next morn.

Six bottles a piece had well wore out the night,  
When gallant Sir Robert, to finish the fight,  
Turn'd o'er in one bumper a bottle of red,  
And swore 'twas the way that their ancestor did.

Then worthy Glenriddel, so cautious and sage,  
No longer the warfare, ungodly, would wage;  
A high ruling-elder to wallow in wine!<sup>1</sup>  
He left the foul business to folks less divine.

The gallant Sir Robert fought hard to the end;  
But who can with fate and quart-bumpers contend?  
Though fate said—a hero shall perish in light;  
So up rose bright Phœbus—and down fell the knight.

Next up rose our bard, like a prophet in drink:—  
'Craigdarroch, thou'lt soar when creation shall sink;  
But if thou would flourish immortal in rhyme,  
Come—one bottle more—and have at the sublime!

'Thy line, that have struggled for freedom with Bruce,  
Shall heroes and patriots ever produce:  
So thine be the laurel, and mine be the bay;  
The field thou hast won, by yon bright god of day!'

The whistle remained in the possession of the late Mr R. C. Fergusson of Craigdarroch, M.P. for the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, son of the victor.

There is a point of dubiety in the history of this notable day, respecting Burns's presence at the contest. Professor Wilson infers from the tenor of the poet's letter to Captain Riddel, that he was not present.<sup>2</sup> The eloquent professor is here endeavouring to defend Burns against those who argue, from such compositions as *The Whistle*, that their author gloried in intemperance. But,

<sup>1</sup> An elder of the Scottish church is called a ruling-elder when sent to represent a burgh in the General Assembly. Glenriddel represented the burgh of Dumfries in several successive assemblies.

<sup>2</sup> Essay on the Life and Genius of Burns.

while denying that Burns is to be held as himself a wallower in wine because of his writing such poems, I frankly own my inability to believe that so highly dramatic a description of the Whistle-contest could have been unfaithful to fact in so prominent a particular as the poet's presence. 'A bard was selected to witness the fray' is a phrase too directly indicative to be interpreted as a fiction even in a comic poem. It is, besides, scarcely true that the letter contains no hint of the poet's intended presence: in what other light are we to hold the sentence, 'For me, as Thomson in his *Winter* says of the storm—"I shall hear astonished, and astonished sing?"' If confirmation of the bodily presence of the poet were wanting, it might be had in the testimony of a man still living, who was then a servant in Friars' Carse House. William Hunter, of Cockrune, in the parish of Closeburn, reports that he has a perfect recollection of the whole affair. 'Burns,' he says, 'was present the whole evening. He was invited to attend the party, to see that the gentlemen drank fair, and to commemorate the day by writing a song.

'I recollect well,' he adds, 'that when the dinner was over, Burns quitted the table, and went to a table in the same room that was placed in a window that looked south-east: and there he sat down for the night. I placed before him a bottle of rum and another of brandy, which he did not finish, but left a good deal of each when he rose from the table after the gentlemen had gone to bed. . . . When the gentlemen were put to bed, Burns walked home without any assistance, not being the worse of drink.

'When Burns was sitting at the table in the window, he had pen, ink, and paper, which I brought to him at his own request. He now and then wrote on the paper, and while the gentlemen were sober, he turned round often and chatted with them, but drank none of the claret which they were drinking. . . . I heard him read aloud several parts of the poem, much to the amusement of the three gentlemen.'

The statement of Hunter as to the sobriety which Burns preserved amidst the extreme potations of the night, is, after all, more valuable testimony to his character than the denial of his being present at the banquet. The fact is, Burns was not, up to this time at least, liable to the reproach of any unusual degree of intemperance. He was of too social and mirth-loving a nature to refuse to join in occasional revelries, such as then too frequently occurred amongst gentlemen as well as commoners; but he liked these scenes rather in spite of, than from a love of, the drinking. All his old Ellisland servants testify to the sobriety



of his life there. Elizabeth Smith says that, in the whole course of her half-year's service (1788-9), she never saw her master in the least affected by liquor, except once, and that was at the New Year.

I have been informed by a relative of Sir Robert Lawrie, that he never afterwards quite recovered from the effects of the extraordinary contest described by Burns, though he was able some years after to take an active part in the war of the French Revolution, and survived till 1804.

We have to contemplate the poet, not many days after this extravagant merry-making, in one of the most solemn and affecting passages of his life. The grave had closed over Mary Campbell, as far as our facts and arguments will allow us to assign a date, in the latter part of October 1786. Since then three years had elapsed—years of literary triumph unexampled, of new and startling scenes, of passion, of pleasure, and of pain. The poet had in the interval married and settled in life, and taken up a new and laborious profession. Only a few days back, he was expressing his sense of the importance of being a good husband and father, saying that there lay 'the true pathos and sublime of human life.' It might have been thought that by this time the scenes of wo and scenes of pleasure which passed a few years ago on the banks of the Ayr, would have faded much from memory and feeling. It was above all unlikely that, after the fascinating society of Charlotte Hamilton, Margaret Chalmers, and Clarinda, the ghost of any early rustic love should rise to cross his path and darken his spirit. But no—the simple Highland girl who had trysted to meet him at Greenock, where, instead of him, she found a grave, was like no other of the shades of the past. A day came at the end of harvest, when the date of the death of Mary three years before was recalled to him. According to Mr Lockhart, reporting the statement of Mrs Burns to her friend Mr M'Diarmid, 'he spent that day, though labouring under cold, in the usual work of the harvest, and apparently in excellent spirits. But as the twilight deepened, he appeared to grow "very sad about something," and at length wandered out into the barnyard, to which his wife, in her anxiety, followed him, entreating him in vain to observe that frost had set in, and to return to the fireside. On being again and again requested to do so, he promised compliance; but still remained where he was, striding up and down slowly, and contemplating the sky, which was singularly clear and starry. At last Mrs Burns found him stretched on a mass of straw, with his eyes fixed on a beautiful planet "that shone like another moon," and prevailed on him to come in. He immediately, on entering the house, called for his

desk, and wrote exactly as they now stand, with all the ease of one copying from memory, these sublime and pathetic verses:—

## TO MARY IN HEAVEN.

Thou ling'ring star, with less'ning ray,  
 That lov'st to greet the early morn,  
 Again thou usher'st in the day  
 My Mary from my soul was torn.  
 O Mary! dear departed shade!  
 Where is thy place of blissful rest?  
 See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?  
 Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast!

That sacred hour can I forget,  
 Can I forget the hallowed grove,  
 Where by the winding Ayr we met,  
 To live one day of parting love!  
 Eternity will not efface  
 Those records dear of transports past;  
 Thy image at our last embrace,  
 Ah! little thought we 'twas our last!

Ayr, gurgling, kissed his pebbled shore,  
 O'erhung with wild woods, thick'ning green;  
 The fragrant birch, and hawthorn hoar,  
 Twined am'rous round the raptured scene;  
 The flowers sprang wanton to be prest,  
 The birds sang love on every spray—  
 Till too, too soon, the glowing west  
 Proclaim'd the speed of wing'd day.

Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,  
 And fondly broods with miser care!  
 Time but th' impression stronger makes,  
 As streams their channels deeper wear.  
 My Mary! dear departed shade!  
 Where is thy place of blissful rest?  
 See'st thou thy lover lowly laid?  
 Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast!

Two particulars are to be noted regarding Mr Lockhart's narration—that it assigns September as the date of the incident, and represents evening as the time; whereas we have seen powerful reasons for placing the death of Highland Mary in the latter part of October, and the poem itself seems to imply morning—

'Thou ling'ring star, with less'ning ray,  
 That lov'st to greet the early morn,  
 Again thou usher'st in the day'—

As anything contradictory of our theory of the October date tends to throw discredit on our whole arrangement of the facts of Burns's life at a very important crisis,<sup>1</sup> we must be excused for having taken what might otherwise appear too much pains to ascertain whether Mrs Burns's anecdote is rightly related as to time, and whether probability does not pronounce in favour of October. We shall at the same time shew that, if we are to receive the anecdote at all, the morning must have been *poetically imagined* as the time.

In the first place, the harvest was late that year. We find in the Scottish newspapers of the time, that, in the middle of October, a great deal of grain was still *out* even in the favoured district around Falkirk; while a letter from Sanquhar (Burns's neighbourhood), dated the 21st, states that 'while much was cut, *very little was yet got in*, owing to the bad weather.' It appears that harvest was commenced by the 8th of September in some districts, but was interrupted by rains, and was not concluded till near the end of the ensuing month. Consequently, the incident *might* take place in the latter part of October, and *still be connected with harvest operations*. The second portion of our evidence on the subject is from one of the exact sciences, and appears to us at once to settle the time of the day—the month—and almost the day of the month.

It fully appears that the planet Venus is the one referred to by the poet, for the description applies only to it. Now Venus was in conjunction with the sun, May 30, 1789, and after that became visible as the *evening-star* towards the end of the summer, reaching its greatest brilliancy in winter. It is therefore certain that the star which 'loves to greet the early morn' did not at this time 'usher in the day,' and consequently, so far as the time of day alluded to in the poem is concerned, a poetical liberty was taken with truth. On the 21st of September the sun set at six o'clock, and Venus forty-four minutes thereafter. The planet was consequently not to be seen at that time except faintly in the twilight. But on the 21st of October the sun set in the latitude of Ellisland at 4<sup>h</sup> 53<sup>m</sup>, and Venus 1<sup>h</sup> 3<sup>m</sup> afterwards. Consequently, Venus would then have begun to assume a brilliant appearance during a short interval after sunset. On that day the moon was four days old, and within eight diameters of Venus.<sup>2</sup> The planet would then of course be beginning to be dimmed by the moonlight, and this effect would go on increasing till the moon had passed the full—that is, early in November. If, then,

<sup>1</sup> See Volume I., p. 246-255, and p. 312-316.

<sup>2</sup> I have to express my obligations to Professor Piazzi Smyth, of the University of Edinburgh, for his kind attention in furnishing me with these astronomical particulars.

we are to set aside the possibility of a later month than October, and keeping in view the all but certainty that Mary was not buried till some time after the 12th of that month, it seems reasonable to conclude that the barnyard musings of Burns took place between five and six o'clock of the evening of some day about the 19th or 20th of October, and consequently a very short time after the merry-meeting for the whistle-contest at Friars' Carse.

That a month later than October could have been the date of the incident will, I presume, scarcely be argued for. The moon was at the full on Tuesday the 2d of November, and it could not be till after that day that the first hour of the night would be 'starry,' with Venus in full blaze. By that time, as far as we can gather from the chronicles of the time, the harvest was past. Besides, Mrs Burns might easily mistake September for October, but scarcely for November, a month of such different associations. On this point the temperature of the time might throw some light, if we could be sure of the exact meaning to be attached to the phrase—'the frost had set in.' It chances that the temperature of October that year was unusually high, the average at eight o'clock in the evening in Edinburgh being 45½° Fahrenheit. The *Edinburgh Advertiser* of 30th October speaks of apple-trees and bean-stalks renewing their blossoms in consequence of the extraordinary mildness. On the 19th of October, at eight o'clock in the evening, the thermometer indicated in Edinburgh 51°; on the 20th, at the same hour, 59°; on the 21st, 51° again. The only approach to frost was on the 30th and 31st, when, at eight in the evening, the thermometer was respectively at 33° and 37°. After this it rose to a more temperate point. Hence it becomes evident that *literal frost* did not then exist at any such period of the day. Probably Mrs Burns merely thought the evening was beginning to be comparatively chilly. If we can admit of this construction being put upon her words, I would be disposed to pitch upon the *warmest evening* of the little period within which we are confined—for unless the poet had been in a peculiarly excited state, so as to be insensible to external circumstances, which is obviously a different thing from being in a merely pensive state, we must suppose him as not likely to lie down in the open air after sunset, except under favour of some uncommon amount of 'ethereal mildness.' Seeing, on the other hand, how positively inviting to such a procedure would be a temperature of 59°, I leave the subject with scarcely a doubt that the composition of *To Mary in Heaven* took place on Tuesday the 20th of October, and that this was consequently the date of the death of the heroine.

Burns had written a letter about the late changes in his circumstances to his venerable friend Blacklock, and intrusted it to Robert

Heron, a young scion of the church connected with the south-western district of Scotland, and who was now beginning to busy himself with literary speculations. Heron had proved a faithless messenger, and Blacklock addressed Burns as follows:—

TO MR ROBERT BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 24th August 1793.

DEAR BURNS, thou brother of my heart,  
Both for thy virtues and thy art;  
If art it may be called in thee,  
Which nature's bounty large and free  
With pleasure in thy breast diffuses,  
And warms thy soul with all the Muses.  
Whether to laugh with easy grace,  
Thy numbers move the sage's face,  
Or bid the softer passions rise,  
And ruthless souls with grief surprise,  
'Tis nature's voice distinctly felt,  
Through thee, her organ, thus to melt.

Most anxiously I wish to know,  
With thee of late how matters go:  
How keeps thy much-loved Jean her health?  
What promises thy farm of wealth?  
Whether the Muse persists to smile,  
And all thy anxious cares beguile?  
Whether bright fancy keeps alive?  
And how thy darling infants thrive?

For me, with grief and sickness spent,  
Since I my homeward journey bent,  
Spirits depressed no more I mourn,  
But vigour, life, and health return.  
No more to gloomy thoughts a prey,  
I sleep all night and live all day;  
By turns my friend and book enjoy,  
And thus my circling hours employ;  
Happy while yet these hours remain,  
If Burns could join the cheerful train,  
With wonted zeal, sincere and fervent,  
Salute once more his humble servant,

THOMAS BLACKLOCK.

Burns answered as follows:—

TO DR BLACKLOCK.

ELLISLAND, 21<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1789.

Wow, but your letter made me vauntie !  
 And are ye hale, and weel, and cantie ?  
 I kenned it still your wee bit jauntie,  
     Wad bring ye to :  
 Lord send you aye as weel's I want ye,  
     And then ye'll do.

elated  
 merry

The ill-thief blaw the Heron south !  
 And never drink be near his drouth !  
 He tauld mysel by word o' mouth,  
     He'd tak my letter ;  
 I lippened to the chield in trouth,  
     And bade nae better.

devil  
 trusted  
 desired

But aiblins honest Master Heron  
 Had at the time some dainty fair one,  
 To ware his theologic care on,  
     And holy study ;  
 And tired o' sauls to waste his lear on,  
     E'en tried the body.

perhaps  
 spend

But what d'ye think, my trusty fier,  
 I'm turned a gauger—Peace be here !  
 Parnassian queans, I fear, I fear,  
     Ye'll now disdain me !  
 And then my fifty pounds a year  
     Will little gain me.

Ye glaiket, gleesome, dainty damies,  
 Wha, by Castalia's wimplin' streamies,  
 Lowp, sing, and lave your pretty limbies,  
     Ye ken, ye ken,  
 That strang necessity supreme is  
     'Mang sons o' men.

giddy  
 winding

I hae a wife and twa wee laddies,  
 They maun hae brose and brats o' duddies ;  
 Ye ken yoursels my heart right proud is—  
     I need na vaunt,  
 But I'll sned besoms—thraw saugh woodies,<sup>1</sup>  
     Before they want.

clothes

cut

<sup>1</sup> Woodies—'two or three willow twigs twisted together, used for binding the end of a broom or birch besom.'—*Dr Jamieson*. Burns, in short, avows his willingness to become a broom-maker rather than allow his children to want.

Lord help me through this warld o' care!  
 I'm weary sick o't late and air!  
 Not but I hae a richer share  
     Than mony ithers;  
 But why should ae man better fare,  
     And a' men brithers!

Come, firm Resolve, take thou the van,  
 Thou stalk o' carl-hemp<sup>1</sup> in man!  
 And let us mind, faint heart ne'er wan  
     A lady fair:  
 Wha does the utmost that he can,  
     Will whyles do mair.

sometimes

But to conclude my silly rhyme  
 (I'm scant o' verse, and scant o' time),  
 To make a happy fireside clime  
     To weans and wife,  
 That's the true pathos and sublime  
     Of human life.

My compliments to Sister Beckie;  
 And eke the same to honest Lucky,  
 I wat she is a dainty chuckie,<sup>2</sup>  
     As e'er tread clay!  
 And gratefully, my guid auld cockie,  
     I'm yours for aye.

ROBERT BURNS.

In this light strain—and yet it is a levity involving some very serious things—did Burns write (if our conclusions are correct) the day after he had given vent to the tragic strains *To Mary in Heaven*.

Among Captain Riddel's visitors of this season was Francis Grose—a broken-down English gentleman who, under the impulse of poverty, had been induced to exercise considerable literary and artistic talents for the benefit of the public. A large work on the Antiquities of England had been completed some years ago. He had also produced a treatise on Arms and Armour, another on Military Antiquities, and several minor works. The genius and social spirit of the man were scarcely more remarkable than his personal figure, which was ludicrously squat and obese. Grose having made an inroad into Scotland, for the purpose of sketching and chronicling its antiquities, Burns met him at Friars' Carse,

<sup>1</sup> The male hemp, that which bears the seed; 'Ye have a stalk o' carl-hemp in you,' is a Scotch proverb.—*Kelly*.

<sup>2</sup> Chuckie, a familiar term for a hen, transferred endearingly to a matron of the human species.

and was greatly amused by his aspect and conversation. The comic muse also caught at the antiquarian enthusiasm as a proper subject. The consequence was a poem

ON CAPTAIN GROSE'S PEREGRINATIONS THROUGH SCOTLAND,  
COLLECTING THE ANTIQUITIES OF THAT KINGDOM.

Hear, land o' Cakes, and brither Scots,  
Frae Maidenkirk<sup>1</sup> to Johnny Groat's ;  
If there's a hole in a' your coats,  
I rede you tent it: warn  
A chiel's amang you taking notes,  
And, faith, he'll prent it.

If in your bounds ye chance to light  
Upon a fine, fat, fodgeg wight, plump  
O' stature short, but genius bright,  
That's he, mark weel—  
And wow! he has an unco slight  
O' cauk and keel.

By some auld houlet-haunted biggin, owl building  
Or kirk deserted by its riggin,  
It's ten to ane ye'll find him snug in  
Some eldritch part, unholy  
Wi' deils, they say, Lord save's! colleaguin'  
At some black art.

Ilk ghaist that haunts auld ha' or chaumer,  
Ye gipsy-gang that deal in glamour, necromancy  
And you deep-read in hell's black grammar,  
Warlocks and witches ;  
Ye'll quake at his conjuring hammer,  
Ye midnight bitches.

It's tauld he was a sodger bred,  
And ane wad rather fa'n than fled ;  
But now he's quat the spurtle blade,  
And dog-skin wallet,  
And ta'en the—Antiquarian trade,  
I think they call it.

He has a fouth o' auld nick-nackets, abundance  
Rusty airn caps and jinglin' jackets,  
Wad haud the Lothians three in tackets,  
A towmont guid ;  
And parritch-pats, and auld saut-backets,  
Before the Flood.

<sup>1</sup> Maidenkirk is an inversion of the name of Kirkmaiden, in Wigtonshire, the most southerly parish in Scotland.



Of Eve's first fire he has a cinder;  
 Auld Tubalcain's fire-shool and fender;  
 That which distinguished the gender  
     O' Balaam's ass;  
 A broomstick o' the witch of Endor,  
     Weel shod wi' brass.

Forbye, he'll shape you aff, fu' glag,      quickly  
 The cut of Adam's philabeg;  
 The knife that nicket Abel's craig,      neck  
     He'll prove you fully,  
 It was a faulding jockteleg,<sup>1</sup>  
     Or lang-kail gully.

But wad ye see him in his glee,  
 For meikle glee and fun has he,  
 Then set him down, and twa or three  
     Guid fellows wi' him;  
 And port, O port! shine thou a wee,  
     And then ye'll see him!

Now, by the powers o' verse and prose!  
 Thou art a dainty chiel, O Grose!—  
 Whae'er o' thee shall ill suppose,  
     They sair misca' thee;  
 I'd take the rascal by the nose,  
     Wad say, shame fa' thee.

Another of the *facetiae* of this acquaintance was an

EPITAPH ON CAPTAIN GROSE, THE CELEBRATED ANTIQUARY.

The Devil got notice that GROSE was a-dying,  
 So whip! at the summons, old Satan came flying;  
 But when he approached where poor FRANCIS lay moaning,  
 And saw each bedpost with its burden a-groaning,  
 Astonished, confounded, cried Satan: 'By ——  
 I'll want 'im, ere I take such a damnable load.'

Afterwards, when Grose had gone forward on his mission,

<sup>1</sup> 'Jockteleg, a clasp-knife; Northumberland and Scotland. Probably from Jock of Liege. Liege formerly supplied Scotland with cutlery.'—*Grose's Provincial Glossary*.  
 'The etymology of this word remained unknown till not many years ago, that an old knife was found, having this inscription *Jacques de Liege*, the name of the cutler. Thus it is in exact analogy with *Andrea di Ferrara*.'—*Lord Hailes*.

'After he [James VI.] had gone to England, it is said he boasted to some of his courtiers, that he would repeat a sentence which none of them could understand. Calling one of his stable-boys, he said to him: "Callan, hae there's threttie pennies; gae wa and buy me a *jockteleg*; and gin ye bide, I'll gang to the bougars o' the house, and tak a caber, and reestle your riggin wi' a."—*Dr Jamieson*.

Burns kept up a correspondence with him. Professor Stewart having intimated to the poet a desire to see Grose, the former sent the following letter to his antiquarian friend :—

TO FRANCIS GROSE, ESQ., F.S.A.

SIR—I believe among all our Scots literati you have not met with Professor Dugald Stewart, who fills the moral philosophy chair in the university of Edinburgh. To say that he is a man of the first parts, and, what is more, a man of the first worth, to a gentleman of your general acquaintance, and who so much enjoys the luxury of unencumbered freedom and undisturbed privacy, is not perhaps recommendation enough; but when I inform you that Mr Stewart's principal characteristic is your favourite feature—that sterling independence of mind which, though every man's right, so few men have the courage to claim, and fewer still the magnanimity to support; when I tell you that, unseduced by splendour and undisgusted by wretchedness, he appreciates the merits of the various actors in the great drama of life merely as they perform their parts—in short, he is a man after your own heart, and I comply with his earnest request in letting you know that he wishes above all things to meet with you. His house, *Cappine*, is within less than a mile of Sorn Castle, which you proposed visiting; or if you could transmit him the enclosed, he would with the greatest pleasure meet you anywhere in the neighbourhood. I write to Ayrshire to inform Mr Stewart that I have acquitted myself of my promise. Should your time and spirits permit your meeting with Mr Stewart, 'tis well; if not, I hope you will forgive this liberty, and I have at least an opportunity of assuring you with what truth and respect I am, sir, your great admirer, and very humble servant,

R. B.

Not being, after all, very sure of the whereabouts of Grose, the bard enclosed his letter in an envelope addressed to Mr Cardonnel, a brother antiquary, and containing a set of jocular verses in imitation of the quaint song of Sir John Malcolm.

WRITTEN IN AN ENVELOPE, ENCLOSING A LETTER TO CAPTAIN GROSE.

Ken ye ought o' Captain Grose?  
 Igo and ago,  
 If he's amang his friends or foes?  
 Iram, coram, dago.

Is he to Abra'm's bosom gane?  
 Igo and ago,  
 Or hauding Sarah by the wame?  
 Iram, coram, dago,

n\*

Is he south or is he north?  
                   Igo and ago,  
 Or drownèd in the river Forth?  
                   Iram, coram, dago.

Is he slain by Highlan' bodies?  
                   Igo and ago,  
 And eaten like a wether haggis?  
                   Iram, coram, dago.

Where'er he be, the Lord be near him;  
                   Igo and ago,  
 As for the deil, he daurna steer him,  
                   Iram, coram, dago.

But please transmit the enclosed letter,  
                   Igo and ago,  
 Which will oblige your humble debtor,  
                   Iram, coram, dago.

So may ye hae auld stanes in store,  
                   Igo and ago,  
 The very stanes that Adam bore,  
                   Iram, coram, dago.

So may ye get in glad possession,  
                   Igo and ago,  
 The coins o' Satan's coronation!  
                   Iram, coram, dago.

The Excise business might have been a benefit to Burns in more respects than in that of income, if it had only filled up time otherwise liable to be spent in idleness or invaded by dissipation. Neither can we suppose that frequent riding through the beautiful scenery of Nithsdale could be quite an unsuitable way for a poet to spend part of his time. On the contrary, as Burns had always been accustomed to compose while engaged in labour out of doors, his present life might have been expected to prove rather favourable to the Muse than otherwise. It appears, however, that the business was overtaking. The ten parishes which Burns surveyed form a tract not less than fifteen miles each way. It called for his riding about two hundred miles a week. Under this serious exaction upon his strength, spirits, and time, neither the mental nor the agricultural farm of Burns got fair play.

The poet, however, was diligent and exact in the performance of his official duty to a degree which I question if two out of every ten of the present literary men of England would be found to attain. He bent his strong faculties to the purpose, and he

accomplished it, whatever the Dalilabs of the imagination might say to the contrary. Inspired with a just view of the contraband trade as an infraction and disturbance of the rights of the fair trader, he was disposed to be severe with the regular smuggler; but in petty matters of inaccuracy, or even something worse, among the country brewsters and retailers, he tempered justice with mercy. The late Professor Gillespie of St Andrews remembered seeing Burns on a fair day in August 1793 at the village of Thornhill, where, as was not uncommon in those days, a poor woman named Kate Watson had, for one day, taken up the trade of a publican, of course without a licence. 'I saw the poet enter her door, and anticipated nothing short of an immediate seizure of a certain greybeard and barrel which, to my personal knowledge, contained the contraband commodities our bard was in quest of. A nod, accompanied by a significant movement of the forefinger, brought Kate to the doorway or trance, and I was near enough to hear the following words distinctly uttered: "Kate, are you mad? Don't you know that the supervisor and I will be in upon you in the course of forty minutes? Good-by t'ye at present." Burns was in the street and in the midst of the crowd in an instant, and I had access to know that the friendly hint was not neglected. It saved a poor widow from a fine of several pounds, for committing a quarterly offence by which the revenue was probably subject to an annual loss of five shillings.'<sup>1</sup>

Allan Cunningham relates a similar anecdote. 'The poet and a brother exciseman one day suddenly entered a widow-woman's shop in Dunscore, and made a seizure of smuggled tobacco. "Jenny," said the poet, "I expected this would be the upshot. Here, Lewars, take note of the number of rolls as I count them. Now, Jock, did ye ever hear an auld wife numbering her threads before check-reels were invented? Thou's ane, and thou's no ane, and thou's ane a' out—listen." As he handed out the rolls, he went on with his humorous enumeration, but dropping every other roll into Janet's lap. Lewars took the desired note with much gravity, and saw as if he saw not the merciful conduct of his companion.'

We see in these homely facts the same benevolent nature which shines in the verses to the Mouse and the Mountain-daisy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh Literary Journal, 1829.

<sup>2</sup> 'Jean Dunn, a suspected trader in Kirkpatrick-Durham, observing Burns and Robertson—another exciseman—approaching her house on the morning of a fair, slipped out by the back-door, apparently to evade their scrutiny, leaving in her house only her attendant for the day and her daughter, a little girl. "Has there been any brewing for the fair here to-day?" demanded the poet as he entered the cabin. "O no, sir," was the reply of the servant: "we ha'e nae licence for that." "That's no true," exclaimed the child: "the muckle black kist is fou' o' the bottles o' yill that my mother sat up a' night brewing for the fair." "Does that

TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, 1st Nov. 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I had written you long ere now, could I have, guessed where to find you, for I am sure you have more good sense than to waste the precious days of vacation-time in the dirt of business and Edinburgh. Wherever you are, God bless you, and lead you not into temptation, but deliver you from evil!

I do not know if I have informed you that I am now appointed to an Excise division, in the middle of which my house and farm lie. In this I was extremely lucky. Without ever having been an expectant, as they call their journeymen excisemen, I was directly planted down to all intents and purposes an officer of Excise, there to flourish and bring forth fruits—worthy of repentance.

I know not how the word *exciseman*, or still more opprobrious, *gauger*, will sound in your ears. I too have seen the day when my auditory nerves would have felt very delicately on this subject; but a wife and children are things which have a wonderful power in blunting these kind of sensations. Fifty pounds a year for life, and a provision for widows and orphans, you will allow is no bad settlement for a *poet*. For the ignominy of the profession, I have the encouragement which I once heard a recruiting sergeant give to a numerous, if not a respectable audience, in the streets of Kilmarnock: ‘Gentlemen, for your further and better encouragement, I can assure you that our regiment is the most blackguard corps under the crown, and consequently with us an honest fellow has the surest chance of preferment.’

You need not doubt that I find several very unpleasant and disagreeable circumstances in my business; but I am tired with and disgusted at the language of complaint against the evils of life. Human existence in the most favourable situations does not abound with pleasures, and has its inconveniences and ills: capricious, foolish man mistakes these inconveniences and ills as if they were the peculiar property of his particular situation; and hence that eternal fickleness, that love of change, which has ruined, and daily does ruin, many a fine fellow, as well as many a blockhead, and is almost without exception a constant source of disappointment and misery.

I long to hear from you how you go on—not so much in business as in life. Are you pretty well satisfied with your own exertions, and tolerably at ease in your internal reflections? ‘Tis much to be a great character as a lawyer, but beyond comparison more to be a great character as a man. That you may be both the one and the other is the earnest wish, and that you *will* be both is the firm persuasion of, my dear sir, &c.

R. B.

bird speak?” said Robertson, pointing to one hanging in a cage. “There is no use for another speaking-bird in this house,” said Burns, “while that little lassie is to the fore. We are in a hurry just now; but as we return from the fair, we’ll examine the muckle black kist.” Of course, when they returned, the kist belied the little lassie’s tale.—Communicated by Mr Joseph Train.

TO MR RICHARD BROWN.

ELLISLAND, 4th November 1789.

I HAVE been so hurried, my ever-dear friend, that though I got both your letters, I have not been able to command an hour to answer them as I wished ; and even now, you are to look on this as merely confessing debt and craving days. Few things could have given me so much pleasure as the news that you were once more safe and sound on terra firma, and happy in that place where happiness is alone to be found—in the fireside circle. May the benevolent Director of all things peculiarly bless you in all those endearing connections consequent on the tender and venerable names of husband and father! I have indeed been extremely lucky in getting an additional income of £50 a year, while, at the same time, the appointment will not cost me above £10 or £12 per annum of expenses more than I must have inevitably incurred. The worst circumstance is, that the Excise division which I have got is so extensive—no less than ten parishes to ride over—and it abounds, besides, with so much business, that I can scarcely steal a spare moment. However, labour endears rest, and both together are absolutely necessary for the proper enjoyment of human existence. I cannot meet you anywhere. No less than an order from the Board of Excise at Edinburgh is necessary, before I can have so much time as to meet you in Ayrshire. But do you come and see me. We must have a social day, and perhaps lengthen it out with half the night, before you go again to sea. You are the earliest friend I now have on earth, my brothers excepted; and is not that an endearing circumstance? When you and I first met, we were at the green period of human life. The twig would easily take a bent, but would as easily return to its former state. You and I not only took a mutual bent, but, by the melancholy, though strong influence of being both of the family of the unfortunate, we were intertwined with one another in our growth towards advanced age; and blasted be the sacrilegious hand that shall attempt to undo the union! You and I must have one bumper to my favourite toast: ‘May the companions of our youth be the friends of our old age!’ Come and see me one year; I shall see you at Port-Glasgow the next, and if we can contrive to have a gossiping between our two bedfellows, it will be so much additional pleasure. Mrs Burns joins me in kind compliments to you and Mrs Brown. Adieu! I am ever, my dear sir, yours,

R. B.

TO MR WILLIAM BURNS.

ELLISLAND, 10th Nov. 1789.

DEAR WILLIAM—I would have written you sooner, but I am so hurried and fatigued with my Excise business, that I can scarcely

pluck up resolution to go through the effort of a letter to anybody. Indeed you hardly deserve a letter from me, considering that you have spare hours in which you have nothing to do at all, and yet it was near three months between your two last letters.

I know not if you heard lately from Gilbert. I expect him here with me about the latter end of this week. \* \* \* \* My mother is returned, now that she has seen my little boy Francis fairly set to the world. I suppose Gilbert has informed you that you have got a new nephew. He is a fine thriving fellow, and promises to do honour to the name he bears. I have named him Francis Wallace, after my worthy friend, Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop.

The only Ayrshire news that I remember in which I think you will be interested is that Mr Ronald is bankrupt. You will easily guess that from his insolent vanity in his sunshine of life he will now feel a little retaliation from those who thought themselves eclipsed by him; for, poor fellow, I do not think he ever intentionally injured any one. I might indeed perhaps except his wife, whom he certainly has used very ill; but she is still fond of him to distraction, and bears up wonderfully—much superior to him—under this severe shock of fortune. Women have a kind of sturdy sufferance which qualifies them to endure, beyond, much beyond, the common run of men; but perhaps part of that fortitude is owing to their short-sightedness, for they are by no means famous for seeing remote consequences in all their real importance.

I am very glad at your resolution to live within your income, be that what it will. Had poor Ronald done so, he had not this day been a prey to the dreadful miseries of insolvency. You are at the time of life when those habitudes are begun which are to mark the character of the future man. Go on and persevere, and depend on less or more success. I am, dear William, your brother, R. B.

The dutiful kindness of Burns to this young brother has already been alluded to. We have before us a letter of William Burns, dated from Morpeth, 29th November 1789, including an account of moneys and articles of clothing furnished for him by the poet during the preceding eighteen months, to the amount of £5, 9s. In August of this year two guineas had been advanced, which the young man says he intended to repay about Christmas; 'but,' he adds, 'as you can spare them, I will keep them till I go to London, when I expect soon to be able to clear you off in full.' He goes on to express a hope that 'young Wallace bids fair to rival his great predecessor in strength and wisdom.' He apologises for seldom writing by the fact, that he is devoting his leisure time to reading from a circulating library. He has read *Kames's Sketches of the History of Man*, *Boswell's Tour to the Hebrides*, *Burns's Poems*, and *Beattie's Dissertations*, and will be glad if his brother will set down the names of a few other books which he should inquire for.

A contest for the representation of the Dumfries group of burghs commenced in September between Sir James Johnston of Westerhall, the existing member, and Captain Miller, younger of Dalswinton, son of Burns's landlord. In this affair the bard stood variously affected. Professing only a whimsical Jacobitism, he had hitherto taken no decided part with either of the two great factions of his time; but he had a certain leaning towards Mr Pitt and his supporters.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, some of his best friends—as Henry Erskine, the Earl of Glencairn, Mr Miller, Captain Riddel—were Whigs, and these persons he was fearful to offend. The ferment of democracy had already commenced in France, and Lafayette brought Louis and his wife and children through the mob from Versailles to Paris only a fortnight before Burns was apostrophising the shade of Mary in the barnyard at Ellisland. But the frenzy had not yet spread to Scotland, and our poet nowhere makes any allusion to it. On this canvass becoming keen, Burns threw in his pen, but rather from the contagion of local excitement than from partisanship. One feeling, indeed, he had in earnest, and this was detestation of the Duke of Queensberry. The duke, who was the greatest landlord in Nithsdale, was considered as having proved something like a traitor to the king on the late occasion of the Regency Bill, when he was in the minority which voted for the surrender of the power of the crown into the hands of the Prince of Wales without restriction. For this, and for his mean personal character and heartless debaucheries, Burns held his Grace in extreme contempt. In the first place, then, he penned an election ballad, chiefly against the duke.

## THE LADDIES BY THE BANKS O' NITH.

TUNE—*Up and waur them a'.*

The laddies by the banks o' Nith,  
 Wad trust his Grace wi' a', Jamie,  
 But he'll sair them as he sair'd the king— serve  
 Turn tail and rin awa, Jamie.

<sup>1</sup> On the subject of Burns's politics, Sir Walter Scott makes a remark in sending some of the poet's letters to Mr Lockhart:—"In one of them to that singular old curmudgeon, Lady Winifred Constable, you will see he plays high Jacobite, and on that account it is curious; though I imagine his Jacobitism, like my own, belonged to the fancy rather than the reason. He was, however, a great Pittite down to a certain period. There were some passing stupid verses in the papers, attacking and defending his satire on a certain preacher whom he termed "an unco calf." In one of them occurred these lines in vituperation of the adversary—

"A Whig, I guess. But Rab's a Tory,  
 And gies us mony a funny story."

This was in 1787.



Up and waur them a', Jamie,  
 Up and waur them a';  
 The Johnstons hae the guidin' o't,<sup>1</sup>  
 Ye turncoat Whigs, awa.

baffle

The day he stude his country's friend,  
 Or gied her faes a claw, Jamie,  
 Or frae puir man a blessin' wan,  
 That day the duke ne'er saw, Jamie.

But wha is he, his country's boast!  
 Like him there is na twa, Jamie;  
 There's no a callant tents the kye,  
 But kens o' Westerha', Jamie.

boy watches

To end the wark, here's Whistlebirck,<sup>2</sup>  
 Lang may his whistle blaw, Jamie;  
 And Maxwell true o' sterling blue,  
 And we'll be Johnstons a', Jamie.

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TO ROBERT GRAHAM, ESQ. OF FINTRY.

9th December 1789.

SIR—I have a good while had a wish to trouble you with a letter, and had certainly done it long ere now but for a humiliating something that throws cold water on the resolution, as if one should say: 'You have found Mr Graham a very powerful and kind friend indeed, and that interest he is so kindly taking in your concerns you ought, by everything in your power, to keep alive and cherish.' Now, though, since God has thought proper to make one powerful and another helpless, the connection of obliger and obliged is all fair; and though my being under your patronage is to me highly honourable, yet, sir, allow me to flatter myself that as a poet and an honest man you first interested yourself in my welfare, and principally as such still you permit me to approach you.

I have found the Excise business go on a great deal smoother with me than I expected, owing a good deal to the generous friendship of Mr Mitchel, my collector, and the kind assistance of Mr Findlater, my supervisor. I dare to be honest, and I fear no labour. Nor do I find my hurried life greatly inimical to my correspondence with the Muses. Their visits to me, indeed, and I believe to most of

<sup>1</sup> A Border proverb, significant of the great local power of this family in former times. The Gordons were the subject of a similar proverb, which forms the title of a beautiful melody.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Birtwhistle, Esq. merchant at Kirkcudbright, and provost of the burgh. A contemporary chronicle notices him as carrying on a brisk foreign trade from that little port.

their acquaintance, like the visits of good angels, are short and far between; but I meet them now and then as I jog through the hills of Nithsdale, just as I used to do on the banks of Ayr. I take the liberty to enclose you a few bagatelles, all of them the productions of my leisure thoughts in my Excise rides.

If you know or have ever seen Captain Grose, the antiquary, you will enter into any humour that is in the verses on him. Perhaps you have seen them before, as I sent them to a London newspaper. Though I daresay you have none of the Solemn-League-and-Covenant fire which shone so conspicuous in Lord George Gordon and the Kilmarnock weavers, yet I think you must have heard of Dr McGill, one of the clergymen of Ayr, and his heretical book. God help him, poor man! Though he is one of the worthiest, as well as one of the ablest, of the whole priesthood of the Kirk of Scotland, in every sense of that ambiguous term, yet the poor doctor and his numerous family are in imminent danger of being thrown out to the mercy of the winter winds. The enclosed ballad on that business is I confess too local; but I laughed myself at some conceits in it, though I am convinced in my conscience that there are a good many heavy stanzas in it too.

The election ballad, as you will see, alludes to the present canvass in our string of boroughs. I do not believe there will be such a hard-run match in the whole general election. \* \* \* \*

I am too little a man to have any political attachments: I am deeply indebted to, and have the warmest veneration for, individuals of both parties; but a man who has it in his power to be the father of a country, and who \* \* \* \*,<sup>1</sup> is a character that one cannot speak of with patience.

Sir James Johnston does 'what man can do,' but yet I doubt his fate.

R. B.

The ballad alluded to was one in which he presents the five burghs under figurative characters most felicitously drawn: Dumfries as Maggy on the banks of Nith; Annan as Blinking Bess of Annandale; Kirkcudbright as Whisky Jean of Galloway; Sanquhar as Black Joan frae Crichton Peel; and Lochmaben as Marjory of the many Lochs—appellations all of which have some appropriateness from local circumstances.

#### THE FIVE CARLINES.

There were five carlines in the south,  
They fell upon a scheme,  
To send a lad to Lon'on town,  
To bring them tidings hame.

old women

<sup>1</sup> Dr Currie has here obviously suppressed a bitter allusion to the Duke of Queensberry.

Nor only bring them tidings hame,  
 But do their errands there,  
 And aiblins gowd and honour baith      possibly  
 Might be that laddie's share.

There was Maggy by the banks o' Nith,  
 A dame wi' pride eneugh,  
 And Marjory o' the Mony Lochs,  
 A carline auld and tough.

And Blinkin' Bess o' Annandale,  
 That dwelt near Solwayside,  
 And Whisky Jean, that took her gill,  
 In Galloway sae wide.

And Black Jean, frae Crichton Peel,  
 O' gipsy kith and kin—  
 Five wighter carlines warn a foun'      handsomer  
 The south countra within.

To send a lad to Lon'on town,  
 They met upon a day,  
 And mony a knight and mony a laird  
 Their errand fain would gae.

O mony a knight and mony a laird  
 This errand fain would gae;  
 But nae ane could their fancy please,  
 O ne'er a ane but twae.

The first he was a belted knight,<sup>1</sup>  
 Bred o' a Border clan,  
 And he wad gae to Lon'on town,  
 Might nae man him withstan'.

And he wad do their errands weel,  
 And meikle he wad say,  
 And ilka ane at Lon'on court  
 Would bid to him guid-day.

Then next came in a sodger youth,<sup>2</sup>  
 And spak wi' modest grace,  
 And he wad gae to Lon'on town,  
 If sae their pleasure was.

<sup>1</sup> Sir James Johnston.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Miller.

He wadna hecht them courtly gifts,  
Nor meikle speech pretend,  
But he wad hecht an honest heart  
Wad ne'er desert a friend. promise

Now, wham to choose, and wham refuse,  
At strife thir carlines fell;  
For some had gentlè folks to please,  
And some wad please themsel.

Then out spak mim-mou'ed Meg o' Nith, prim-mouthed  
And she spak up wi' pride,  
And she wad send the sodger youth,  
Whatever might betide.

For the auld guidman o' Lon'on court<sup>1</sup>  
She didna care a pin;  
But she wad send the sodger youth  
To greet his eldest son.<sup>2</sup>

Then up sprang Bess o' Annandale,  
And a deadly aith she's ta'en,  
That she wad vote the Border knight,  
Though she should vote her lane.

For far-aff fowls hae feathers fair,  
And fools o' change are fain;  
But I hae tried the Border knight,  
And I'll try him yet again.

Says Black Joan frae Crichton Peel,  
A carline stoor and grim, austere  
The auld guidman, and the young guidman,  
For me may sink or swim;

For fools will freit<sup>3</sup> o' right or wrang,  
While knaves laugh them to scorn;  
But the sodger's friends hae blawn the best,  
So he shall bear the horn.

Then Whisky Jean spak owre her drink,  
Ye weel ken, kimmers a',  
The auld guidman o' Lon'on court  
His back's been at the wa';

<sup>1</sup> The King.

<sup>2</sup> The Prince of Wales.

<sup>3</sup> Talk superstitiously.

And mony a friend that kiss'd his cup  
 Is now a fremit wight : estranged  
 But it's ne'er be said o' Whisky Jean—  
 I'll send the Border knight.  
 Then slow raise Marjory o' the Lochs,  
 And wrinkled was her brow,  
 Her ancient weed was russet gray,  
 Her auld Scots bluid was true ;<sup>1</sup>  
 There's some great folks set light by me—  
 I set as light by them ;  
 But I will send to Lon'on town  
 Wham I like best at hame.  
 Sae how this weighty plea may end  
 Nae mortal wight can tell :  
 God grant the king and ilka man  
 May look weel to himsel.

Towards the close of the year, excessive business application, joined to the usual effects of social life and a poetical temperament, brought Burns to a sick-chamber.

#### TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 13th December 1789.

MANY thanks, my dear madam, for your sheetful of rhymes. Though at present I am below the veriest prose, yet from you everything pleases. I am groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous-system—a system, the state of which is most conducive to our happiness or the most productive of our misery. For now near three weeks I have been so ill with a nervous headache that I have been obliged for a time to give up my Excise-books, being scarce able to lift my head, much less to ride once a week over ten muir parishes. What is man ! To-day, in the luxuriance of health, exulting in the enjoyment of existence ; in a few days, perhaps in a few hours, loaded with conscious painful being, counting the tardy pace of the lingering moments by the repercussions of anguish, and refusing or denied a comforter. Day follows night, and night comes after day, only to curse him with life which gives him no pleasure ; and yet the awful, dark termination of that life is something at which he recoils.

' Tell us, ye dead ; will none of you in pity  
 Disclose the secret —————  
 What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be ?  
 'tis no matter :  
 A little time will make us learned as you are.' <sup>2</sup>

Can it be possible, that when I resign this frail, feverish being, I

<sup>1</sup> It may not be unworthy of notice that this verse was one in great favour with Sir Walter Scott, who used to recite it with good effect.

<sup>2</sup> Blair's Grave.

shall still find myself in conscious existence! When the last gasp of agony has announced that I am no more to those that knew me and the few who loved me; when the cold, stiffened, unconscious, ghastly corse is resigned into the earth, to be the prey of unsightly reptiles, and to become in time a trodden clod, shall I be yet warm in life, seeing and seen, enjoying and enjoyed? Ye venerable sages and holy flamens, is there probability in your conjectures, truth in your stories, of another world beyond death; or are they all alike baseless visions and fabricated fables? If there is another life, it must be only for the just, the benevolent, the amiable, and the humane; what a flattering idea, then, is a world to come! Would to God I as firmly believed it as I ardently wish it! There I should meet an aged parent, now at rest from the many buffetings of an evil world, against which he so long and so bravely struggled. There should I meet the friend, the disinterested friend, of my early life; the man who rejoiced to see me, because he loved me and could serve me. Muir, thy weaknesses were the aberrations of human nature, but thy heart glowed with everything generous, manly, and noble; and if ever emanation from the All-good Being animated a human form, it was thine! There should I, with speechless agony of rapture, again recognise my lost, my ever-dear Mary! whose bosom was fraught with truth, honour, constancy, and love.

My Mary, dear departed shade!

Where is thy place of heavenly rest?

Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?

Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

Jesus Christ, thou amiablest of characters! I trust thou art no impostor, and that thy revelation of blissful scenes of existence beyond death and the grave is not one of the many impositions which time after time have been palmed on credulous mankind. I trust that in thee 'shall all the families of the earth be blessed,' by being yet connected together in a better world, where every tie that bound heart to heart in this state of existence shall be, far beyond our present conceptions, more endearing.

I am a good deal inclined to think with those who maintain that what are called nervous affections are in fact diseases of the mind. I cannot reason, I cannot think; and but to you I would not venture to write anything above an order to a cobbler. You have felt too much of the ills of life not to sympathise with a diseased wretch who has impaired more than half of any faculties he possessed. Your goodness will excuse this distracted scrawl, which the writer dare scarcely read, and which he would throw into the fire were he able to write anything better, or indeed anything at all.

Rumour told me something of a son of yours who was returned from the East or West Indies. If you have gotten news from James or Anthony, it was cruel in you not to let me know; as I promise you, on the sincerity of a man who is weary of one world and anxious about another, that scarce anything could give me so

much pleasure as to hear of any good thing befalling my honoured friend.

If you have a minute's leisure, take up your pen in pity to *le pauvre miserable*  
R. B.

Written four days after a letter to Mr Graham, in which he spoke of a cheerful and alert performance of his Excise duties, one might be apt to suspect some error in the date of this to Mrs Dunlop, wherein he discourses as one reduced by a long illness to the most serious feelings. But no such theory is in reality required to reconcile this epistle either to that to Mr Graham or to one written only a week afterwards to the provost of Lochmaben, in which our bard seems to have carried the jocular a good way beyond the bounds of decorum. A headache of three weeks' standing had now perhaps laid him up from his duties for one or two days; and low spirits were the consequence. Having to write to Mrs Dunlop, a lady of refined sentiments and a deep sense of religion, Burns attuned his mind accordingly, and poured out this sentimental effusion, involving feelings of which we have no reason to doubt that for the moment they were sincere, although very likely the first walk out to the river-side in the eye of the morning sun, or the first ride across the Dunscore Hills in quest of fiscal delinquents, set him off into a totally different strain of emotion. What is very curious, the letter which he describes as a 'distracted scrawl,' composed with only half of his faculties, appears after all to have been a deliberate transcription with some amplifications from an entry of his last year's commonplace-book. (See Volume II., p. 265.) Another of the *mystères d'atelier* of Burns!

Amongst the gentry of Dumfriesshire, Burns would be led by his Jacobitism to single out for especial regard the Lady Winifred Maxwell, grand-daughter of that Earl of Nithsdale who owed his escape from the block for his concern in the insurrection of 1715 solely to the heroism and ingenuity of his wife, with whom he exchanged clothes in the Tower the night before his intended execution. There seems to have been a proposal to introduce the bard to her ladyship; but it had been prevented by the illness alluded to in the letter to Mrs Dunlop:

#### TO LADY WINIFRED MAXWELL CONSTABLE.<sup>1</sup>

ELLISLAND, 16th December 1789.

'MY LADY—In vain have I from day to day expected to hear from Mrs Young, as she promised me at Dalswinton that she would do me

<sup>1</sup> Her ladyship had married William Haggerston Constable of Everingham, by whom she had several children.

the honour to introduce me at Tinwald ; and it was impossible, not from your ladyship's accessibility, but from my own feelings, that I could go alone. Lately, indeed, Mr Maxwell of Carruchan in his usual goodness offered to accompany me, when an unlucky indisposition on my part hindered my embracing the opportunity. To court the notice or the tables of the great, except where I sometimes have had a little matter to ask of them, or more often the pleasanter task of witnessing my gratitude to them, is what I never have done, and I trust never shall do. But with your ladyship I have the honour to be connected by one of the strongest and most endearing ties in the whole moral world. Common sufferers in a cause where even to be unfortunate is glorious—the cause of heroic loyalty ! Though my fathers had not illustrious honours and vast properties to hazard in the contest, though they left their humble cottages only to add so many units more to the unnoted crowd that followed their leaders, yet what they could they did, and what they had they lost : with unshaken firmness and unconcealed political attachments, they shook hands with ruin for what they esteemed the cause of their king and their country. This language and the enclosed verses<sup>1</sup> are for your ladyship's eye alone. Poets are not very famous for their prudence ; but as I can do nothing for a cause which is now nearly no more, I do not wish to hurt myself. I have the honour to be, my lady, your ladyship's obliged and obedient humble servant,

R. B.

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 TO PROVOST MAXWELL, OF LOCHMABEN.

ELLISLAND, 30th December 1789.

DEAR PROVOST—As my friend, Mr Graham, goes for your good town to-morrow, I cannot resist the temptation to send you a few lines, and as I have nothing to say, I have chosen this sheet of foolscap, and begun, as you see, at the top of the first page, because I have ever observed, that when once people have fairly set out, they know not where to stop. Now that my first sentence is concluded, I have nothing to do but to pray Heaven to help me on to another. Shall I write you on politics, or religion, two master-subjects for your sayers of nothing ! Of the first, I daresay by this time you are nearly surfeited ;<sup>2</sup> and for the last, whatever they may talk of it who make it a kind of company-concern, I never could endure it beyond a soliloquy. I might write you on farming, on building, on marketing ; but my poor distracted mind is so torn, so jaded, so racked and bedeviled with the task of the superlatively damned to make one guinea do the business of three, that I detest, abhor, and

<sup>1</sup> These addressed to Mr William Tytler.

<sup>2</sup> The provost, as the leading voter in *Marjory of the Mony Lochs*, must have recently had a sufficiency of politics.



swoon at the very word business, though no less than four letters of my very short surname are in it.

Well, to make the matter short, I shall betake myself to a subject ever fruitful of themes—a subject the turtle-feast of the sons of Satan, and the delicious secret sugar-plum of the babes of grace—a subject sparkling with all the jewels that wit can find in the mines of genius, and pregnant with all the stores of learning from Moses and Confucius to Franklin and Priestley—in short, may it please your lordship, I intend to write \* \* \*

[‘Here,’ says Allan Cunningham, ‘the poet inserted a song, the specification of which could be of no benefit to his fame.’]

If at any time you expect a field-day in your town—a day when dukes, earls, and knights pay their court to weavers, tailors, and cobblers—I should like to know of it two or three days beforehand. It is not that I care three skips of a cur-dog for the politics, but I should like to see such an exhibition of human nature. If you meet with that worthy old veteran in religion and good-fellowship, Mr Jeffrey, or any of his amiable family, I beg you will give them my best compliments.

R. B.

In the conclusion of this letter, Burns alludes to the minister of Lochmaben. In the course of his perambulations, he was occasionally in the house of this worthy man. Mr. Jeffrey had a daughter, a sweet, blue-eyed young creature, who at one of Burns’s visits, probably the first, did the honours of the table. Next morning our poet presented at breakfast a song which has given the young lady immortality:

#### THE BLUE-EYED LASSIE.<sup>1</sup>

I gaed a waefu’ gate yestreen,	road
A gate, I fear, I’ll dearly rue;	
I gat my death frae twa sweet een,	
Twa lovely een o’ bonnie blue.	
’Twas not her golden ringlets bright;	
Her lips like roses wat wi’ dew,	
Her heaving bosom, lily-white—	
It was her een sae bonnie blue.	

She talked, she smiled, my heart she wiled;	
She charmed my soul—I wist na how;	
And aye the stound, the deadly wound,	pang
Cam frae her een sae bonnie blue.	

<sup>1</sup> This song was printed in Johnson’s Museum, with an air composed by Mr Riddel of Glenriddel. It has been set by George Thomson to the tune of ‘The Blathrie o’t,’ but, in the opinion of the present editor, it flows much more sweetly to ‘My only Joe and dearie O.’

But, spare to speak, and spare to speed;<sup>1</sup>

She'll aiblins listen to my vow :

Should she refuse, I'll lay my dead

To her twa een sas bonnie blue.

perhaps  
death

Miss Jeffrey married a gentleman named Renwick of New York, and was living there about 1822, when a son of Mr George Thomson was introduced to her by her son, the professor of chemistry in Columbia College. Mr Thomson gave the following account of her to his father: 'She is a widow—has still the remains of Burns's delightful portrait of her: her *twa sweet een*, that gave him his death, are yet clear and full of expression. She has great suavity of manners and much good sense.' He then adds from her recollection a charming picture of the manners of Burns in refined and agreeable society. 'She told me that she often looks back with a melancholy satisfaction on the many evenings she spent in the company of the great bard, in the social circle of her father's fireside, listening to the brilliant sallies of his imagination and to his delightful conversation. "Many times," said she, "have I seen Burns enter my father's dwelling in a cold rainy night, after a long ride over the dreary moors. On such occasions one of the family would help to disenumber him of his dreadnought and boots, while others brought him a pair of slippers and made him a warm dish of tea. It was during these visits that he felt himself perfectly happy, and opened his whole soul to us, repeated and even sang many of his admirable songs, and enchanted all who had the good fortune to be present with his manly, luminous observations and artless manners. I never," she added, "could fancy that Burns had ever followed the rustic occupation of the plough, because everything he said or did had a gracefulness and charm that was in an extraordinary degree engaging."'<sup>2</sup>

It may be pleasant to many to know, that Captain Wilks of the United States' navy, and superior of the exploratory expedition whose publication has been received in this country as a valuable contribution to science, is a son-in-law of the *Blue-eyed Lassie* of Burns. Mrs Renwick, however, had the fate to see Mrs Wilks and others of her children go to the grave before her.

In the *New York Mirror* (1846) appeared the following notice regarding Mrs Renwick:—'The lady to whom the following verses—never before published—were addressed, known to the readers of Burns as the "*Blue-eyed Lassie*," is one of a race whose beauties and virtues formed for several generations the inspiration of the master of the Scottish song. Her mother was Agnes

<sup>1</sup> A proverbial expression.

<sup>2</sup> New edition of Mr Thomson's *Melodies*, 1830.

Armstrong, in whose honour the touching words and beautiful air of "Roslin Castle" were composed, and "Fairie fair"<sup>1</sup> was her more remote progenitrix.'

The editor then adds the following song as a composition of Burns :—

## SONG.

AIR—*Maggy Lauder,*

When first I saw fair Jeanie's face,  
 I couldna tell what ailed me,  
 My heart went fluttering pit-a-pat,  
 My een they almost failed me.  
 She's aye sae neat, sae trim, sae tight,  
 All grace does round her hover,  
 Ae look deprived me o' my heart,  
 And I became a lover.  
 She's aye, aye sae blithe, sae gay,  
 She's aye so blithe and cheerie ;  
 She's aye sae bonny, blithe, and gay  
 O gin I were her dearie !

Had I Dundas's whole estate,  
 Or Hopetoun's wealth to shine in ;  
 Did warlike laurels crown my brow,  
 Or humbler bays entwining—  
 I'd lay them a' at Jeanie's feet,  
 Could I but hope to move her,  
 And prouder than a belted knight,  
 I'd be my Jeanie's lover.  
 She aye, aye sae blithe, sae gay, &c.

But sair I fear some happier swain  
 Has gained sweet Jeanie's favour :  
 If so, may every bliss be hers,  
 Though I maun never have her,  
 But gang she east, or gang she west,  
 'Twixt Forth and Tweed all over,  
 While men have eyes, or ears, or taste,  
 She'll always find a lover.  
 She's aye, aye sae blithe, sae gay, &c.

Mrs Renwick has been for some years dead.

The Countess of Glencairn, mother of his beloved patron, had from the first shewn Burns much kindness. By her origin, as we

<sup>1</sup> This allusion is not readily intelligible. The person meant seems to be 'Fairlie fair,' a fictitious character in the ballad of *Hardyknute*, written at the beginning of the last century by Lady Wardlaw.

have seen, she was a somewhat remarkable person among the Scottish nobility, being the daughter of a village musician, who was raised to unexpected wealth by the bequest of a fortunate relative. Her ladyship had lately written a kind letter to Burns.

## TO THE COUNTESS OF GLENCAIRN.

[ELLISLAND, December 1789.]

MY LADY—The honour you have done your poor poet in writing him so very obliging a letter, and the pleasure the enclosed beautiful verses have given him, came very seasonably to his aid amid the cheerless gloom and sinking despondency of diseased nerves and December weather. As to forgetting the family of Glencairn, Heaven is my witness with what sincerity I could use those old verses, which please me more in their rude simplicity than the most elegant lines I ever saw—

'If thee, Jerusalem, I forget,  
Skill part from my right hand.  
My tongue to my mouth's roof let cleave,  
If I do thee forget,  
Jerusalem, and thee above  
My chief joy do not set.'

When I am tempted to do anything improper, I dare not, because I look on myself as accountable to your ladyship and family. Now and then, when I have the honour to be called to the tables of the great, if I happen to meet with any mortification from the stately stupidity of self-sufficient squires, or the luxurious insolence of upstart nabobs, I get above the creatures by calling to remembrance that I am patronised by the noble House of Glencairn; and at galatimes—such as New-Year's Day, a christening, or the kirk-night, when my punch-bowl is brought from its dusty corner, and filled up in honour of the occasion, I begin with—*The Countess of Glencairn!* My good woman, with the enthusiasm of a grateful heart, next cries *My Lord!* and so the toast goes on until I end with *Lady Harriet's little angel!*<sup>1</sup> whose epithalamium I have pledged myself to write.

When I received your ladyship's letter I was just in the act of transcribing for you some verses I have lately composed, and meant to have sent them my first leisure hour, and acquainted you with my late change of life. I mentioned to my lord my fears concerning my farm. Those fears were indeed too true; it is a bargain would have ruined me but for the lucky circumstance of my having an Excise commission.

People may talk as they please of the ignominy of the Excise; £50 a year will support my wife and children, and keep me independent of the world; and I would much rather have it said that my profession borrowed credit from me, than that I borrowed

<sup>1</sup> Lady Harriet Don was the daughter of Lady Glencairn. Her child was the late accomplished Sir Alexander Don, of Newton-Don, Bart.

credit from my profession. Another advantage I have in this business is the knowledge it gives me of the various shades of human character, consequently assisting me vastly in my poetic pursuits. I had the most ardent enthusiasm for the Muses when nobody knew me but myself, and that ardour is by no means cooled now that my Lord Glencairn's goodness has introduced me to all the world. Not that I am in haste for the press. I have no idea of publishing, else I certainly had consulted my noble, generous patron; but after acting the part of an honest man, and supporting my family, my whole wishes and views are directed to poetic pursuits. I am aware that though I were to give performances to the world superior to my former works, still if they were of the same kind with those, the comparative reception they would meet with would mortify me. I have turned my thoughts on the drama. I do not mean the stately buskin of the tragic muse. Does not your ladyship think that an Edinburgh theatre would be more amused with affectation, folly, and whim of true Scottish growth, than manners, which by far the greatest part of the audience can only know at second-hand? I have the honour to be your ladyship's ever devoted and grateful humble servant,

R. B.

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 SKETCH—NEW-YEAR'S DAY [1790.]

TO MRS DUNLOP.

This day, Time winds th' exhausted chain,  
 To run the twelvemonth's length again:  
 I see the old, bald-pated fellow,  
 With ardent eyes, complexion sallow,  
 Adjust the unimpaired machine,  
 To wheel the equal, dull routine.

The absent lover, minor heir,  
 In vain assail him with their prayer;  
 Deaf as my friend, he sees them press,  
 Nor makes the hour one moment less.  
 Will you (the Major's<sup>1</sup> with the hounds,  
 The happy tenants share his rounds;  
 Coila's fair Rachel's<sup>2</sup> care to-day,  
 And blooming Keith's engaged with Gray)  
 From housewife cares a minute borrow—  
 —That grandchild's cap will do to-morrow—  
 And join with me a-moralising,  
 This day's propitious to be wise in.  
 First, what did yesternight deliver?  
 'Another year is gone for ever.'

hh

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards General Dunlop of Dunlop.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel, a daughter of Mrs Dunlop, was making a sketch of Coila.

And what is this day's strong suggestion ?  
 'The passing moment's all we rest on !'  
 Rest on—for what ! what do we here !  
 Or why regard the passing year !  
 Will time, amused with proverb'd lore,  
 Add to our date one minute more !  
 A few days may—a few years must—  
 Repose us in the silent dust.  
 Then is it wise to damp our bliss !  
 Yes—all such reasonings are amiss !  
 The voice of Nature loudly cries,  
 And many a message from the skies,  
 That something in us never dies :  
 That on this frail, uncertain state,  
 Hang matters of eternal weight :  
 That future life in worlds unknown  
 Must take its hue from this alone ;  
 Whether as heavenly glory bright,  
 Or dark as misery's woeful night.  
 Since, then, my honoured, first of friends,  
 On this poor being all depends,  
 Let us th' important *now* employ,  
 And live as those who never die.  
 Though you, with days and honours crowned,  
 Witness that filial circle round  
 (A sight, life's sorrows to repulse,  
 A sight, pale envy to convulse),  
 Others now claim your chief regard ;  
 Yourself, you wait your bright reward.

Burns was at this time pressed with business, yet at the same time as much the victim of hypochondria as if he had been left to total vacuity. The evil prospects of his farm harassed his mind. Busied and vexed as he was, he found time to pay occasional evening visits to Dumfries, in order to witness the performances of a tolerable company of players which had temporarily settled there. He had even been led by these theatricals to turn his thoughts to the comic drama as a line not unworthy of the efforts of Coila. But neither at this time nor any other did he ever get beyond the composition of an occasional address or epilogue.

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TO MR GILBERT BURNS.

ELLISLAND, 11th January 1790.

DEAR BROTHER—I mean to take advantage of the frank, though I have not in my present frame of mind much appetite for exertion

in writing. My nerves are in a — state. I feel that horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body and soul. This farm has undone my enjoyment of myself. It is a ruinous affair on all hands. But let it go to —! I'll fight it out, and be off with it.

We have got a set of very decent players here just now. I have seen them an evening or two. David Campbell, in Ayr, wrote to me by the manager of the company, a Mr Sutherland, who is a man of apparent worth. On New-Year's-Day evening I gave him the following prologue, which he spouted to his audience with applause:

#### PROLOGUE,

SPOKEN AT THE THEATRE, DUMFRIES, ON NEW-YEAR'S-DAY EVENING [1790.]

No song nor dance I bring from yon great city  
That queens it o'er our taste—the more's the pity:  
Though, by the by, abroad why will you roam?  
Good sense and taste are natives here at home:  
But not for panegyric I appear,  
I come to wish you all a good new-year!  
Old Father Time deposes me here before ye,  
Not for to preach, but tell his simple story:  
The sage grave ancient coughed, and bade me say:  
'You're one year older this important day.'  
If wiser, too—he hinted some suggestion,  
But 'twould be rude, you know, to ask the question;  
And with a would-be roguish leer and wink,  
He bade me on you press this one word—'think!'

Ye sprightly youths, quite flushed with hope and spirit,  
Who think to storm the world by dint of merit,  
To you the dotard has a deal to say,  
In his sly, dry, sententious, proverb way:  
He bids your mind, amid your thoughtless rattle,  
That the first blow is ever half the battle;  
That though some by the skirt may try to snatch him,  
Yet by the forelock is the hold to catch him;  
That whether doing, suffering, or forbearing,  
You may do miracles by persevering.

Last, though not least in love, ye youthful fair,  
Angelic forms, high Heaven's peculiar care!  
To you old Bald-pate smooths his wrinkled brow,  
And humbly begs you'll mind the important Now!  
To crown your happiness he asks your leave,  
And offers bliss to give and to receive.

For our sincere, though haply weak endeavours,  
With grateful pride we own your many favours;  
And howso'er our tongues may ill reveal it,  
Believe our glowing bosoms truly feel it.

I can no more. If once I was clear of this damned farm, I should respire more at ease.

Three days after the writing of this fretful letter, he was restored to a calmer humour.

TO MR WILLIAM DUNBAR, W.S.

ELLISLAND, 14th January 1790.

SINCE we are here creatures of a day, since 'a few summer days, and a few winter nights, and the life of man is at an end,' why, my dear, much-esteemed sir, should you and I let negligent indolence—for I know it is nothing worse—step in between us and bar the enjoyment of a mutual correspondence? We are not shapen out of the common, heavy, methodical clod, the elemental stuff of the plodding, selfish race, the sons of Arithmetic and Prudence; our feelings and hearts are not benumbed and poisoned by the cursed influence of riches, which, whatever blessing they may be in other respects, are no friends to the nobler qualities of the heart: in the name of random sensibility, then, let never the moon change on our silence any more. I have had a tract of bad health most part of this winter, else you had heard from me long ere now. Thank Heaven, I am now got so much better as to be able to partake a little in the enjoyments of life.

Our friend Cunningham will perhaps have told you of my going into the Excise. The truth is, I found it a very convenient business to have £50 per annum, nor have I yet felt any of these mortifying circumstances in it that I was led to fear.

*Feb. 2d.*—I have not, for sheer hurry of business, been able to spare five minutes to finish my letter. Besides my farm business, I ride on my Excise matters at least 200 miles every week. I have not by any means given up the Muses. You will see in the third volume of Johnson's *Scots Songs* that I have contributed my mite there.

But, my dear sir, little ones that look up to you for paternal protection are an important charge. I have already two fine healthy stout little fellows, and I wish to throw some light upon them. I have a thousand reveries and schemes about them and their future destiny—not that I am a Utopian projector in these things. I am resolved never to breed up a son of mine to any of the learned professions. I know the value of independence; and since I cannot give my sons an independent fortune, I shall give them an independent line of life. What a chaos of hurry, chance, and changes is this world, when one sits soberly down to reflect on it! To a father, who himself knows the world, the thought that he shall have sons to usher into it must fill him with dread; but if he have daughters, the prospect in a thoughtful moment is apt to shock him.

I hope Mrs Fordyce and the two young ladies are well. Do let me forget that they are nieces of yours, and let me say that I never saw



a more interesting, sweeter pair of sisters in my life. I am the fool of my feelings and attachments. I often take up a volume of my Spenser to realise you to my imagination,<sup>1</sup> and think over the social scenes we have had together. God grant that there may be another world more congenial to honest fellows beyond this: a world where these rubs and plagues of absence, distance, misfortunes, ill health, &c. shall no more damp hilarity and divide friendship. This I know is your throng season, but half a page will much oblige, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

Mrs Dunlop appears to have at this time accompanied one of her many kind letters with a present, perhaps with some reference to the thirty-first birthday of the bard, which was approaching. On that day he wrote to her one of the most interesting of his letters:

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 25th January 1790.

It has been owing to unremitting hurry of business that I have not written to you, madam, long ere now. My health is greatly better, and I now begin once more to share in satisfaction and enjoyment with the rest of my fellow-creatures.

Many thanks, my much-esteemed friend, for your kind letters; but why will you make me run the risk of being contemptible and mercenary in my own eyes? When I pique myself on my independent spirit, I hope it is neither poetic licence nor poetic rant: and I am so flattered with the honour you have done me, in making me your compeer in friendship and friendly correspondence, that I cannot without pain and a degree of mortification be reminded of the real inequality between our situations.

Most sincerely do I rejoice with you, dear madam, in the good news of Anthony. Not only your anxiety about his fate, but my own esteem for such a noble, warm-hearted, manly young fellow, in the little I had of his acquaintance, has interested me deeply in his fortunes.

Falconer, the unfortunate author of the *Shipwreck*, which you so much admire, is no more. After witnessing the dreadful catastrophe he so feelingly describes in his poem, and after weathering many hard gales of fortune, he went to the bottom with the *Aurora* frigate!

I forget what part of Scotland had the honour of giving him birth, but he was the son of obscurity and misfortune.<sup>2</sup> He was one of those daring, adventurous spirits which Scotland, beyond any other country, is remarkable for producing. Little does the fond mother think as she hangs delighted over the sweet little leech at her

<sup>1</sup> The poet's copy of Spenser was a present from Mr Dunbar.

<sup>2</sup> Falconer was the son of a tradesman in the Netherbow of Edinburgh.

bosom, where the poor fellow may hereafter wander, and what may be his fate. I remember a stanza in an old Scottish ballad,<sup>1</sup> which, notwithstanding its rude simplicity, speaks feelingly to the heart—

‘Little did my mother think,  
That day she cradled me,  
What land I was to travel in,  
Or what death I should die!’

Old Scottish songs are, you know, a favourite study and pursuit of mine; and now I am on that subject, allow me to give you two stanzas of another old simple ballad, which I am sure will please you. The catastrophe of the piece is a poor ruined female lamenting her fate. She concludes with this pathetic wish—

‘O that my father had ne’er on me smiled;  
O that my mother had ne’er to me sung!  
O that my cradle had never been rocked;  
But that I had died when I was young!

O that the grave it were my bed;  
My blankets were my winding-sheet;  
The clocks and the worms my bedfellows a’;  
And O see sound as I should sleep!’

I do not remember in all my reading to have met with anything more truly the language of misery than the exclamation in the last line. Misery is like love; to speak its language truly, the author must have felt it.

I am every day expecting the doctor to give your little godson<sup>2</sup> the small-pox. They are *ri’e* in the country, and I tremble for his fate. By the way, I cannot help congratulating you on his looks and spirit. Every person who sees him acknowledges him to be the finest, handsomest child he has ever seen. I am myself delighted with the manly swell of his little chest, and a certain miniature dignity in the carriage of his head, and the glance of his fine black eye, which promise the undaunted gallantry of an independent mind.

I thought to have sent you some rhymes, but time forbids. I promise you poetry until you are tired of it next time I have the honour of assuring you how truly I am, &c.

R. B.

About this time the Clarinda correspondence was for a moment renewed, the following letter appearing as an answer to one from the lady, which has not been preserved. It is remarkable for the admission it makes of misconduct in his past career, though inferring that the circumstances in which imprudence had involved

<sup>1</sup> Queen Mary had four attendants of her own Christian name. In the ballad mentioned by Burns, one of these gentlewomen is described as murdering her illegitimate child, and suffering for the crime; and the verse quoted is one of her last expressions at the place of execution. The incident is supposed to be fictitious.

<sup>2</sup> The bard's second son, Francis.

him left him no means of a spotless escape. There can scarcely be a doubt that the song with which it closes was written in compliment to his correspondent. From few men besides Burns could any lady have expected, along with an apology for deserting her only twenty months ago, a pleasant-faced canzonet of compliment declaring the world to be lightless without love.

## SYLVANDER TO CLARINDA.

[About February 1790.]<sup>1</sup>

I HAVE indeed been ill, madam, this whole winter. An incessant headache, depression of spirits, and all the truly miserable consequences of a deranged nervous system, have made dreadful havoc of my health and peace. Add to all this, a line of life, into which I have lately entered, obliges me to ride upon an average at least two hundred miles every week. However, thank Heaven, I am now greatly better in my health. \* \* \*

I cannot, will not, enter into extenuatory circumstances; else I could shew you how my precipitate, headlong, unthinking conduct, leagued with a conjuncture of unlucky events to thrust me out of a possibility of keeping the path of rectitude; to curse me by an irreconcilable war between my duty and my nearest wishes, and to damn me with a choice only of different species of error and misconduct.

I dare not trust myself farther with this subject. The following song is one of my latest productions, and I send it you as I would do anything else, because it pleases myself:—

## MY LOVELY NANCY.

TUNE—*The Quaker's Wife.*

Thine am I, my faithful fair,  
Thine, my lovely Nancy;  
Every pulse along my veins,  
Every roving fancy.

To thy bosom lay my heart,  
There to throb and languish:  
Though despair had wrung its core,  
That would heal its anguish.

Take away those rosy lips,  
Rich with balmy treasure;  
Turn away thine eyes of love,  
Lest I die with pleasure.

<sup>1</sup> In the authorised edition of the correspondence this letter is conjecturally dated spring of 1791. The hypochondria complained of, and the allusion to the recent entrance upon the Excise business, bring it for certain a year farther back.

What is life when wanting love?  
 Night without a morning:  
 Love's the cloudless summer sun,  
 Nature gay adorning.

Towards the conclusion of the theatrical season at Dumfries, Coila came once more to the aid of Mr Manager Sutherland; but it cannot be said that her effusion was such as to hold forth a very favourable prognostic of dramatic effort.

PROLOGUE FOR MR SUTHERLAND'S BENEFIT NIGHT, DUMFRIES.

What needs this din about the town o' Lon'on,  
 How this new play and that new sang is comin'!  
 Why is outlandish stuff sae meikle courted?  
 Does nonsense mend like whisky, when imported?  
 Is there nae poet, burning keen for fame,  
 Will try to gie us songs and plays at hame?  
 For comedy abroad he needna toil,  
 A fool and knave are plants of every soil;  
 Nor need he hunt as far as Rome and Greece  
 To gather matter for a serious piece;  
 There's themes enough in Caledonian story,  
 Would shew the tragic Muse in a' her glory.

Is there no daring bard will rise, and tell  
 How glorious Wallace stood, how hapless fell?  
 Where are the Muses fled that could produce  
 A drama worthy o' the name o' Bruce;  
 How here, even here, he first unsheathed the sword  
 'Gainst mighty England and her guilty lord;  
 And after mony a bloody, deathless doing,  
 Wrenched his dear country from the jaws of ruin?  
 O for a Shakspeare or an Otway scene,  
 To draw the lovely, hapless Scottish Queen!  
 Vain all th' omnipotence of female charms  
 'Gainst headlong, ruthless, mad rebellion's arms.  
 She fell, but fell with spirit truly Roman,  
 To glut the vengeance of a rival woman:  
 A woman—though the phrase may seem uncivil—  
 As able and as cruel as the devil!  
 One Douglas lives in Home's immortal page,  
 But Douglasses were heroes every age:  
 And though your fathers, prodigal of life,  
 A Douglas followed to the martial strife,  
 Perhaps if bowls row right, and Right succeeds,  
 Ye yet may follow where a Douglas leads!

As ye hae generous done, if a' the land  
 Would take the Muses' servants by the hand;  
 Not only hear, but patronise, befriend them,  
 And where ye justly can commend, commend them;  
 And aiblins when they winna stand the test,  
 Wink hard, and say the folks hae done their best!  
 Would a' the land do this, then I'll be caution  
 Ye'll soon hae poets o' the Scottish nation,  
 Will gar Fame blaw until her trumpet crack,  
 And warsle Time, and lay him on his back! strive with  
 For us and for our stage should ony spier, ask  
 'Wha's aught thae chieles maks a' this bustle here?' men  
 My best leg foremost, I'll set up my brow,  
 We have the honour to belong to you!  
 We're your ain bairns, e'en guide us as ye like, children  
 But like gude mithers, shore before you strike. threaten  
 And gratefu' still I hope ye'll ever find us,  
 For a' the patronage and meikle kindness  
 We've got frae a' professions, sets, and ranks:  
 God help us! we're but poor—ye'se get but thanks.

The third volume of the *Scots Musical Museum* had been going on, somewhat more slowly than the second, but with an equal amount of assistance from Burns. Besides the songs already cited since the date of the second volume, he contributed many which, as they bore no particular reference to his own history, nor any other trait by which the exact date of their composition could be ascertained, are here presented in one group. Several of them are, however, only old songs mended or extended by Burns.

#### TIBBIE DUNBAR.

TUNE—*Johnny M' Gill.*

O wilt thou go wi' me, sweet Tibbie Dunbar!  
 O wilt thou go wi' me, sweet Tibbie Dunbar!  
 Wilt thou ride on a horse or be drawn in a car,  
 Or walk by my side, sweet Tibbie Dunbar!

I carena thy daddie, his lands and his money,  
 I carena thy kin, sae high and sae lordly;  
 But say thou wilt hae me, for better for waur,  
 And come in thy coatie, sweet Tibbie Dunbar!

## THE GARDENER WI' HIS PAIDLE.

TUNE—*The Gardeners' March.*

[It will be found that Burns subsequently produced a new version of this song, changing the burden at the close of the stanzas.]

When rosy morn comes in wi' showers,  
To deck her gay green birken bowers,  
Then busy, busy are his hours,  
The gardener wi' his paidle.

The crystal waters gently fa',  
The merry birds are lovers a',  
The scented breezes round him blaw,  
The gardener wi' his paidle.

When purple morning starts the hare,  
To steal upon her early fare,  
Then through the dews he maun repair,  
The gardener wi' his paidle.

When day, expiring in the west,  
The curtain draws of Nature's rest,  
He flies to her arms he loes the best,  
The gardener wi' his paidle.

## HIGHLAND HARRY.

[Of this song Burns says: 'The chorus I picked up from an old woman in Dunblane; the rest of the song is mine.' It is evident that the poet has understood the chorus in a Jacobite sense, and written his own verses in that strain accordingly. Mr Peter Buchan has, nevertheless, ascertained that the original song related to a love attachment between Harry Lumdale, the second son of a Highland gentleman, and Miss Jeanie Gordon, daughter to the Laird of Knockespock, in Aberdeenshire. The lady was married to her cousin, Habichie Gordon, a son of the Laird of Rhynie; and some time after, her former lover having met her and shaken her hand, her husband drew his sword in anger, and lopped off several of Lumdale's fingers, which Highland Harry took so much to heart, that he soon after died.—See Hogg and Motherwell's edition of Burns, ii. 197.]

My Harry was a gallant gay,  
Fu' stately strode he on the plain:  
But now he's banished far away;  
I'll never see him back again.  
O for him back again!  
O for him back again!  
I wad gie a' Knockhaspie's land  
For Highland Harry back again.

When a' the lave gae to their bed,  
 I wander dowie up the glen;  
 I set me down and greet my fill,  
 And aye I wish him back again.

rest  
 and  
 cry

O were some villains hangit high,  
 And ilka body had their ain!  
 Then I might see the joyfu' sight,  
 My Highland Harry back again.

# BONNIE ANN.

Air—*Ye Gallants bright.*

[‘I composed this song out of compliment to Miss Ann Masterton, the daughter of my friend Allan Masterton, the author of the air “Strathallan’s Lament,” and two or three others in this work.’—*Burns*. Miss Masterton afterwards became Mrs Derbyshire, and was living in London in 1834.]

Ye gallants bright, I rede ye right,  
 Beware o’ bonnie Ann;  
 Her comely face sae fu’ o’ grace,  
 Your heart she will trepan.  
 Her een sae bright, like stars by night,  
 Her skin is like the swan;  
 Sae jimply laced her genty waist,  
 That sweetly ye might span.

Youth, grace, and love attendant move,  
 And pleasure leads the van:  
 In a’ their charms and conquering arms  
 They wait on bonnie Ann.  
 The captive bands may chain the hands,  
 But love enslaves the man;  
 Ye gallants braw, I rede you a’,  
 Beware o’ bonnie Ann!

# JOHN ANDERSON.

TUNE—*John Anderson my jo.*

John Anderson my jo, John,  
 When we were first acquent,  
 Your locks were like the raven,  
 Your bonnie brow was brent;  
 But now your brow is beld, John,  
 Your locks are like the snaw;  
 But blessings on your frosty pow,  
 John Anderson my jo.

John Anderson my jo, John,  
 We clamb the hill thegither,  
 And mony a canty day, John,  
 We've had wi' ane anither :  
 Now we maun totter down, John,  
 But hand in hand we'll go,  
 And sleep thegither at the foot,  
 John Anderson my jo.

THE BATTLE OF SHERIFF-MUIR.<sup>1</sup>TUNE—*Cameronian Band.*

[In this instance, Burns has concentrated in his own language a more diffuse song on the same subject which is understood to have been the composition of Mr Barclay, a Berean minister of some note about the middle of the last century, uncle to the distinguished anatomist of the same name.]

'O cam ye here the fight to shun,	
Or herd the sheep wi' me, man !	
Or were ye at the Sherra-muir,	
And did the battle see, man !'	
'I saw the battle, sair and tough,	
And reekin' red ran mony a sheugh ;	channel
My heart, for fear, gaed sough for sough,	sigh
To hear the thuds, and see the cluda,	knocks
O' clans frae woods, in tartan duds,	clothes
Wha glaumed at kingdoms three, man.	grasped
'The red-coat lads, wi' black cockades,	
To meet them were na slaw, man ;	
They rushed and pushed, and bluid outgushed,	
And mony a bouk did fa', man :	corpses
The great Argyle led on his files,	
I wat they glanced for twenty miles :	
They hacked and hashed, while broadswords clashed,	
And through they dashed, and hewed, and smashed,	
Till fey men died awa, man.	predestined
'But had you seen the philabegs,	
And skyrin tartan trews, man ;	shining
When in the teeth they dared our Whigs,	
And covenant true blues, man ;	
In lines extended lang and large,	
When bayonets opposed the targe,	
And thousands hastened to the charge,	

<sup>1</sup> 'This was written about the time our bard made his tour to the Highlands, 1787.'—*Currie*. Gilbert Burns entertained a doubt if the song was by his brother; but for this we can see no just grounds.



Wi' Highland wrath they frae the sheath  
Drew blades o' death, till, out o' breath,  
They fled like frightened doos, man.'

' O how deil, Tam, can that be true !  
The chase gaed frae the North, man ;  
I saw myself, they did pursue  
The horsemen back to Forth, man ;  
And at Dunblane, in my ain sight,  
They took the brig wi' a' their might,  
And straught to Stirling winged their flight ;  
But, cursed lot ! the gates were shut ;  
And mony a huntit, poor red-coat,  
For fear amaisht did swarf, man !'

swoon

' My sister Kate cam up the gate  
Wi' crowdie unto me, man ;  
She swore she saw some rebels run  
Frae Perth unto Dundee, man :  
Their left-hand general had nae skill,  
The Angus lads had nae good will  
That day their neibors' blood to spill ;  
For fear, by foes, that they should lose  
Their cogs o' brose—all crying woes ;  
And so it goes, you see, man.

porridge

' They've lost some gallant gentlemen  
Amang the Highland clans, man :  
I fear my Lord Panmure is slain,  
Or fallen in Whiggish hands, man :  
Now wad ye sing this double fight,  
Some fell for wrang, and some for right ;  
But mony bade the world guid-night ;  
Then ye may tell, how pell and mell,  
By red claymores, and muskets' knell,  
Wi' dying yell, the Tories fell,  
And Whigs to hell did flee, man.'

## BLOOMING NELLY.

*TUNE—On a Bank of Flowers.*

On a bank of flowers, in a summer day,  
For summer lightly drest,  
The youthful, blooming Nelly lay,  
With love and sleep opprest ;  
When Willie, wandering through the wood,  
Who for her favour oft had sued,  
He gazed, he wished, he feared, he blushed,  
And trembled where he stood.

### THIRD VOLUME OF JOHNSON'S MUSEUM.

Her closed eyes like weapons sheathed,  
Were sealed in soft repose;  
Her lip, still as she fragrant breathed,  
It richer dyed the rose.  
The springing lilies sweetly prest,  
Wild-wanton, kissed her rival breast;  
He gazed, he wished, he feared, he blushed—  
His bosom ill at rest.

Her robes light waving in the breeze,  
Her tender limbs embrace;  
Her lovely form, her native ease,  
All harmony and grace:  
Tumultuous tides his pulses roll,  
A faltering, ardent kiss he stole;  
He gazed, he wished, he feared, he blushed,  
And sighed his very soul.

As flies the partridge from the brake  
On fear-inspired wings,  
So Nelly starting, half awake,  
Away affrighted springs:  
But Willy followed, as he should;  
He overtook her in the wood;  
He vowed, he prayed, he found the maid  
Forgiving all and good.

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### MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS.

TUNE—*Faillie na Mìog.*

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;  
My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer;  
A-chasing the wild deer, and following the roe—  
My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.

Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North,  
The birthplace of valour, the country of worth;  
Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,  
The hills of the Highlands for ever I love.

Farewell to the mountains high covered with snow;  
Farewell to the straths and green valleys below;  
Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods;  
Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods.

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;  
 My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer:  
 A-chasing the wild deer, and following the roe—  
 My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.

[In this song Burns caught up the single streak of poetry which existed in a well-known old stall song, entitled *The Strong Walls of Derry*, and which commences thus:—

'The first day I landed 'twas on Irish ground,  
 The tidings came to me from fair Derry town,  
 That my love was married, and to my sad wo,  
 And I lost my first love by courting too slow.'

After many stanzas of similar doggerel, the author breaks out, as under an inspiration, with the one fine verse, which Burns afterwards seized as a basis for his own beautiful ditty:

'My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;  
 My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer;  
 A-chasing the deer, and following the roe—  
 My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.']

#### THE BANKS OF NITH.

TUNE—*Robie donna Gorach.*

The Thames flows proudly to the sea,  
 Where royal cities stately stand;  
 But sweeter flows the Nith, to me,  
 Where Cummins once had high command;  
 When shall I see that honoured land,  
 That winding stream I love so dear!  
 Must wayward fortune's adverse hand  
 For ever, ever keep me here!  
 How lovely, Nith, thy fruitful vales,  
 Where spreading hawthorns gaily bloom!  
 How sweetly wind thy sloping dales,  
 Where lambkins wanton through the broom!  
 Though wandering, now, must be my doom,  
 Far from thy bonnie banks and braes,  
 May there my latest hours consume,  
 Among the friends of early days!

#### MY HEART IS A-BREAKING, DEAR TITIE!

My heart is a-breaking, dear tittie!  
 Some counsel unto me come len',  
 To anger them a' is a pity,  
 But what will I do wi' Tam Glen!  
 I'm thinking wi' sic a braw fellow  
 In poortith I might make a fen';  
 What care I in riches to wallow,  
 If I maunna marry Tam Glen!

sister

child

There's Lowrie, the Laird o' Drumeller,  
 Guid-day to you, brute! he comes ben;  
 He brags and he blaws o' his siller,  
 But when will he dance like Tam Glen!

My minnie does constantly deave me, mother  
 And bids me beware o' young men;  
 They flatter, she says, to deceive me,  
 But wha can think sae o' Tam Glen!

My daddie says, gin I'll forsake him,  
 He'll gie me guid hunder marks ten:  
 But if it's ordained I maun take him,  
 O wha will I get but Tam Glen!

Yestreen at the valentines' dealing,  
 My heart to my mou' gied a sten; bound  
 For thrice I drew ane without failing,  
 And thrice it was written—Tam Glen.

The last Halloween I was waukin—  
 My droukit sark-sleeve, as ye ken; wet  
 His likeness cam up the house staukin,  
 And the very gray breeks o' Tam Glen!

Come counsel, dear tittie! don't tarry—  
 I'll gie you my bonnie black hen,  
 Gif ye will advise me to marry  
 The lad I loe dearly—Tam Glen.

The volume was introduced by a short preface, evidently from the pen of Burns—to whose credit, indeed, this work may almost wholly be placed. '..... As this is not one of those many publications which are hourly ushered into the world merely to catch the eye of fashion in her frenzy of a day, the editor has little to hope or fear from the herd of readers. Consciousness of the well-known merit of our Scottish music, and the national fondness of a Scotchman for the productions of his own country, are at once the editor's motive and apology for this undertaking; and where any of the pieces in the collection may perhaps be found wanting at the critical bar of the first, he appeals to the honest prejudices of the last.'

A circumstance has been obligingly reported to me by Sir James S. Monteath of Closeburn, as illustrating the artist-like care with which Burns even now elaborated and finished his songs. 'There was then living in Closeburn parish a respectable woman, Christina Kirkpatrick, married to a mason named Flint. She had a masculine understanding; was well acquainted with the old music,

the songs and ballads of Scotland; and, having a fine voice and good ear, she sang them remarkably well. At a subsequent time, when the poet's mother lived on a farm which forms part of this estate, she was on intimate terms with Kirsty, to whom, on the removing with her son Gilbert to East Lothian, she gave several little presents; amongst the rest, the low-seated deal-chair on which she had nursed the poet and the rest of her children. This was obligingly presented to me by Kirsty on her deathbed, and it is now in my possession.

'When Burns dwelt at Ellisland, he was accustomed, after composing any of his beautiful songs, to pay Kirsty a visit, that he might hear them sung by her. He often stopped her in the course of the singing, when he found any word harsh and grating to his ear, and substituted one more melodious and pleasing. From Kirsty's extensive acquaintance with the old Scotch airs, she was frequently able to suggest to the poet music more suitable to the song she was singing than that to which he had set it.'<sup>1</sup>

It may also be remarked that Burns was to some extent assisted in the same manner by his wife, whose vocal powers and acquaintance with Scottish airs were much beyond what is common.

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TO MR PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 2d Feb. 1790.

No! I will not say one word about apologies or excuses for not writing—I am a poor, rascally gauger, condemned to gallop at least 200 miles every week to inspect dirty ponds and yeasty barrels, and where can I find time to write to, or importance to interest anybody! The upbraidings of my conscience, nay, the upbraidings of my wife, have persecuted me on your account these two or three months past. I wish to God I was a great man, that my correspondence might throw light upon you, to let the world see what you really are; and then I would make your fortune, without putting my hand in my pocket for you, which, like all other great men, I suppose I would avoid as much as possible. What are you doing, and how are you doing? Have you lately seen any of my few friends? What

<sup>1</sup> A statement confirmatory of the anecdote in the text is made in a communication of the late Professor Thomas Gillespie, of St Andrews, to the *Edinburgh Literary Journal*, December 12, 1829: 'When a schoolboy at Wallace-hall Academy, I saw Burns's horse tied by the bridle to the neck of a cottage-door in the neighbourhood of Thornhill, and lingered for some time listening to the songs which, seated in an arm-chair by the fireside, Burns was listening to. Betty (?) Flint was the name of the songstress. She was neither pretty nor witty, but she had a pipe of the most overpowering pitch, and a taste for song. . . . She sang even to us laddies, *There's nae luck about the house*, and *Braw, braw lads o' Gala Water*, most inimitably.

has become of the BOROUGH REFORM, or how is the fate of my poor namesake Mademoiselle Burns decided? Which of their grave lordships can lay his hand on his heart, and say that he has not taken advantage of such frailty! \* \* \* O man! but for thee and thy selfish appetites and dishonest artifices, that beauteous form, and that once innocent and still ingenuous mind, might have shone conspicuous and lovely in the faithful wife and the affectionate mother; and shall the unfortunate sacrifice to thy pleasures have no claim on thy humanity! <sup>1</sup> \* \* \*

I saw lately in a review some extracts from a new poem, called the *Village Curate*,<sup>2</sup> send it me. I want likewise a cheap copy of *The World*. Mr Armstrong, the young poet, who does me the honour to mention me so kindly in his works, please give him my best thanks for the copy of his book.<sup>3</sup> I shall write him my first leisure hour. I like his poetry much, but I think his style in prose quite astonishing.

What is become of that veteran in genius, wit, and \* \* \*, Smellie, and his book? Give him my compliments. Does Mr Graham of Gartmore ever enter your shop now? He is the noblest instance of great talents, great fortune, and great worth that ever I saw in conjunction. Remember me to Mrs Hill; and believe me to be, my dear sir, ever yours,

R. B.

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TO MR WILLIAM NICOL.

ELLISLAND, Feb. 2, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR—That — mare of yours is dead. I would freely have given her price to have saved her; she has vexed me beyond description. Indebted as I was to your goodness beyond what I can ever repay, I eagerly grasped at your offer to have the mare with me. That I might at least shew my readiness in wishing to be grateful, I took every care of her in my power. She was never crossed for riding above half a score of times by me or in my keeping. I drew her in the plough, one of three, for one poor week. I refused fifty-five shillings for her, which was the highest bode I could squeeze for her. I fed her up, and had her in fine order for Dumfries fair; when, four or five days before the fair, she was seized with an unaccountable disorder in the sinews, or somewhere in the bones of the neck; with a weakness or total want of power in her fillets; and, in short, the whole vertebrae of her spine seemed to be diseased and unhinged; and in eight-and-forty hours, in spite of the two best farriers in the country, she died, and be — to her!

<sup>1</sup> The frail female here alluded to had been the subject of some rather oppressive magisterial proceedings, which took their character from Creech, and roused some public feeling in her behalf.

<sup>2</sup> The *Village Curate*, a poem (8vo, 2s. 6d. sewed. Johnson, London), is reviewed in the *Scots Magazine* for October 1789.

<sup>3</sup> A volume entitled *Juvenile Poems*, by John Armstrong, student in the University of Edinburgh, appeared in the latter part of 1789.

The farriers said that she had been quite strained in the fillets beyond cure before you had bought her; and that the poor devil, though she might keep a little flesh, had been jaded and quite worn out with fatigue and oppression. While she was with me she was under my own eye, and I assure you, my much-valued friend, everything was done for her that could be done; and the accident has vexed me to the heart. In fact, I could not pluck up spirits to write to you on account of the unfortunate business.

There is little new in this country. Our theatrical company, of which you must have heard, leave us this week. Their merit and character are indeed very great, both on the stage and in private life: not a worthless creature among them; and their encouragement has been accordingly. Their usual run is from eighteen to twenty-five pounds a night: seldom less than the one, and the house will hold no more than the other. There have been repeated instances of sending away six, and eight, and ten pounds a night for want of room. A new theatre is to be built by subscription; the first stone is to be laid on Friday first to come. Three hundred guineas have been raised by thirty subscribers, and thirty more might have been got if wanted. The manager, Mr Sutherland, was introduced to me by a friend from Ayr; and a worthier or cleverer fellow I have rarely met with. Some of our clergy have slept in by stealth now and then; but they have got up a farce of their own. You must have heard how the Rev. Mr Lawson of Kirkmahoe, seconded by the Rev. Mr Kirkpatrick of Dunscore,<sup>1</sup> and the rest of that faction, have accused, in formal process, the unfortunate and Rev. Mr Heron of Kirkgunzeon, that in ordaining Mr Nielson to the cure of souls in Kirkbean, he, the said Heron, feloniously and treasonably bound the said Nielson to the confession of faith, *so far as it was agreeable to reason and the word of God!*

Mrs B. begs to be remembered most gratefully to you. Little Bobby and Frank are charmingly well and healthy. I am jaded to death with fatigue. For these two or three months, on an average, I have not ridden less than 200 miles per week. I have done little in the poetic way. I have given Mr Sutherland two *Prologues*, one of which was delivered last week. I have likewise strung four or five barbarous stanzas, to the tune of *Chevy Chase*, by way of Elegy on your poor unfortunate mare, beginning (the name she got here was Peg Nicholson)<sup>2</sup>

#### PEG NICHOLSON.

Peg Nicholson was a good bay mare,  
As ever trode on airn;  
But now she's floating down the Nith,  
And past the mouth o' Cairn.

<sup>1</sup> Burns's own parish priest.

<sup>2</sup> In burlesque allusion, it may be presumed, to the insane woman, Margaret Nicholson, who made an attempt to stab George III. with a knife, August 1788.

Peg Nicholson was a good bay mare,  
And rode through thick and thin ;  
But now she's floating down the Nith,  
And wanting even the skin.

Peg Nicholson was a good bay mare,  
And ance she bore a priest ;  
But now she's floating down the Nith,  
For Solway fish a feast.

Peg Nicholson was a good bay mare,  
And the priest he rode her sair ;  
And much oppressed and bruised she was,  
As priest-rid cattle are—&c. &c.

My best compliments to Mrs Nicol, and little Neddy, and all the family : I hope Ned is a good scholar, and will come out to gather nuts and apples with me next harvest.

R. B.

TO ———

ELLISLAND, 1790.

DEAR SIR—Whether in the way of my trade I can be of any service to the Rev. Doctor,<sup>1</sup> is, I fear, very doubtful. Ajax's shield consisted, I think, of seven bull-hides and a plate of brass, which altogether set Hector's utmost force at defiance. Alas ! I am not a Hector, and the worthy doctor's foes are as securely armed as Ajax was. Ignorance, superstition, bigotry, stupidity, malevolence, self-conceit, envy—all strongly bound in a massy frame of brazen impudence. Good God, sir ! to such a shield, humour is the peck of a sparrow, and satire the pop-gun of a schoolboy. Creation-digracing *scélérats* such as they, God only can mend, and the devil only can punish. In the comprehending way of Caligula, I wish they all had but one neck. I feel impotent as a child to the ardour of my wishes ! O for a withering curse to blast the germina of their wicked machinations. O for a poisonous tornado, winged from the torrid zone of Tartarus, to sweep the spreading crop of their villanous contrivances to the lowest hell !

R. B.

The poet's young brother, William, who had latterly been employed at Newcastle, was now resolved to adventure into the great field of London, and he wrote (24th January 1790) to Robert for a letter of introduction to his old preceptor Murdoch. 'You promised,' he adds, 'when I was intending to go to Edinburgh, to write me some instructions about behaviour in companies

<sup>1</sup> Dr M'Gill, of Ayr.



rather above my station, to which I might be eventually introduced. As I may be introduced into such companies at Murdoch's or on his account, when I go to London, I wish you would write me some such instructions now: I never had more need of them, for, having spent little of my time in company of any sort since I came to Newcastle, I have almost forgot the common civilities of life. To these instructions pray add some of a moral kind, for though—either through the strength of early impressions, or the frigidity of my constitution, I have hitherto withstood the temptation to those vices to which young men are so much addicted, yet I do not know if my virtue will be able to withstand the more powerful temptations of the metropolis; yet, through God's assistance and your instructions, I hope to weather the storm.'<sup>1</sup>

The innocence of this is certainly very charming; and one cannot but be amused at seeing Robert Burns applied to for an edification against the vices most besetting to young and hot blood.

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TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, SADDLER, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

ELLISLAND, 10th February 1790.

MY DEAR WILLIAM— . . . . Now that you are setting out for that place [London], put on manly resolve, and determine to persevere; and in that case you will less or more be sure of success. One or two things allow me to particularise to you. London swarms with worthless wretches who prey on their fellow-creatures' thoughtlessness or inexperience. Be cautious in forming connections with comrades and companions. You can be pretty good company to yourself, and you cannot be too shy of letting anybody know you further than to know you as a saddler. Another caution. . . . . It is an impulse the hardest to be restrained; but if once a man accustoms himself to gratifications of that impulse, it is then nearly or altogether impossible to restrain it. . . . .

I have gotten the Excise division, in the middle of which I live. Poor little Frank is this morning at the height of the small-pox. I got him inoculated, and I hope he is in a good way.

Write me before you leave Newcastle, and as soon as you reach London. In a word, if ever you be, as perhaps you may be, in a strait for a little ready cash, you know my direction. I shall not see you beat while you fight like a man.—Farewell! God bless you.

ROBT. BURNS.

The above letter shews how well Burns could point out

<sup>1</sup> Cromek's Reliques, p. 373.

prudential rules for others. He might well have added to some parts of his preachment—

‘And may you better reck the rede,  
Than ever did th’ adviser!’

Dr Currie published a little, jocular, rhyming epistle which Burns had sent to ‘a gentleman who had sent the poet a newspaper, and offered to continue it free of expense.’ There can scarcely be a doubt that this gentleman was Peter Stuart, to whose newspaper, *The Star*, Burns had sent various contributions in prose and verse. Stuart desired to have the occasional assistance of Burns, and seems to have thought of sending his paper as an inducement and a remuneration. Mr Daniel Stuart reported in 1838<sup>1</sup> that his brother had at this time offered Burns a salary for contributions, ‘quite as large as his Excise endowments.’ He had forgot particulars; but he remembered his brother shewing Burns’s letters, and boasting of the correspondence of so great a genius. It is to be feared that this is not true as to time, if true at all. Neither can we think Mr Daniel Stuart right in calling this jocular epistle of Burns ‘a sneering, unhandsome return’ for his brother’s offer, whatever that might be. It is a piece of mere pleasantry, conceived in the purest good-humour, and with all desirable marks of good-feeling towards the person addressed:

WRITTEN TO A GENTLEMAN WHO HAD SENT THE POET A NEWSPAPER,  
AND OFFERED TO CONTINUE IT FREE OF EXPENSE.

Kind Sir, I’ve read your paper through,	
And, faith, to me ’twas really new!	
How guessed ye, sir, what maist I wanted!	
This mony a day I’ve graned and gaunted,	yawned
To ken what French mischief was brewin’,	
Or what the drumlie Dutch were doin’;	muddy
That vile doup-skelper, Emperor Joseph,	
If Venna yet had got his nose off;	
Or how the collieshangie works	contention
Atween the Russians and the Turks;	
Or if the Swede, before he halt,	
Would play anither Charles the Twalt: <sup>2</sup>	
If Denmark, anybody spak o’t;	
Or Poland, wha had now the tack o’t;	lease
How cut-throat Prussian blades were hingin’;	
How libbet Italy was singin’;	

<sup>1</sup> See a communication of Mr Daniel Stuart, regarding some allegations of Mr Coleridge, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, July 1838.

<sup>2</sup> Gustavus III. had attracted considerable notice in 1789 by his vigorous measures against Russia, and the arrest of many of his nobility who disapproved of his measures.

If Spaniard, Portuguese, or Swiss,  
 Were sayin' or takin' aught amiss :  
 Or how our merry lads at hame,  
 In Britain's court, kept up the game :  
 How Royal George, the Lord leuk o'er him !  
 Was managing St Stephen's quorum ;  
 If sleekit Chatham Will was livin', smooth  
 Or glaikit Charlie got his nieve in ; thoughtless fist  
 How Daddie Burke the plea was cookin',  
 If Warren Hastings' neck was yeukin' ;  
 How cesses, stents, and fees were raxed,  
 Or if bare — yet were taxed ;  
 The news o' princes, dukes, and earls,  
 Pimps, sharpers, bawds, and opera-girls ;  
 If that daft buckie, Geordie Wales,  
 Was threshin' still at hizzies' tails ;  
 Or if he was grown oughtlins douser, soberer  
 And no a perfect kintra cooser.  
 A' this and mair I never heard of,  
 And but for you I might despaired of.  
 So gratefu', back your news I send you,  
 And pray, a' guid things may attend you !

ELLISLAND, *Monday morning, 1790.*

After all, from whatever cause, the gratuitous newspaper did not come very regularly, as appears from a subsequent note of remonstrance sent by the bard to headquarters :—

Dear Peter, dear Peter,  
 We poor sons of metre  
 Are often negleckit, ye ken ;  
 For instance, your sheet, man,  
 (Though glad I'm to see't man),  
 I get it no ae day in ten.—R. B.

Mr. Cunningham of Edinburgh, ever a zealous friend of Burns, had written to him as follows :—

28th January 1790.

In some instances it is reckoned unpardonable to quote any one's own words ; but the value I have for your friendship nothing can more truly or more elegantly express than

'Time but the impression stronger makes,  
 As streams their channels deeper wear.'

Having written to you twice without having heard from you, I am apt to think my letters have miscarried. My conjecture is only framed upon the chapter of accidents turning up against me, as it too often does in the trivial, and I may with truth add, the more important affairs of life ; but I shall continue occasionally to inform

you what is going on among the circle of your friends in these parts. In these days of merriment I have frequently heard your name *proclaimed* at the jovial board, under the roof of our hospitable friend at Stenhouse Mills; there were no

‘Lingering moments numbered with care.’

I saw your *Address to the New-Year* in the ‘Dumfries Journal.’ Of your productions I shall say nothing; but my acquaintances allege that when your name is mentioned—which every man of celebrity must know often happens—I am the champion, the Mendoza, against all snarling critics and narrow-minded reptiles, of whom *a few* on this planet do *crawl*.

With best compliments to your wife and her black-eyed sister, I remain yours, &c.

Burns sent an answer as soon as his now pressing engagements permitted.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 13th February 1790.

I BEG your pardon, my dear and much-valued friend, for writing to you on this very unfashionable, unsightly sheet.

‘My poverty but not my will consents.’

But to make amends, since of modish post I have none, except one poor widowed half-sheet of gilt, which lies in my drawer, among my plebeian foolscap pages, like the widow of a man of fashion whom that unpolite scoundrel, Necessity, has driven from Burgundy and Pine-apple to a dish of Bohea with the scandal-bearing helpmate of a village priest; or a glass of whisky-toddy with a ruby-nosed yoke-fellow of a foot-padding exciseman—I make a vow to enclose this sheetful of epistolary fragments in that my only scrap of gilt-paper.

I am indeed your unworthy debtor for three friendly letters. I ought to have written to you long ere now; but it is a literal fact, I have scarcely a spare moment. It is not that I *will not* write to you: Miss Burnet is not more dear to her guardian angel, nor his Grace the Duke of Queensberry to the powers of darkness, than my friend Cunningham to me. It is not that I *cannot* write to you; should you doubt it, take the following fragment, which was intended for you some time ago, and be convinced that I can *anti-thetize* sentiment and *circumvolute* periods as well as any coiner of phrase in the regions of philology.

December 1789.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM—Where are you? And what are you doing? Can you be that son of levity who takes up a friendship as he takes up a fashion? or are you, like some other of the worthiest fellows in the world, the victim of indolence, laden with fetters of ever-increasing weight?

What strange beings we are! Since we have a portion of conscious existence, equally capable of enjoying pleasure, happiness, and rapture, or of suffering pain, wretchedness, and misery—it is surely worthy of an inquiry, whether there be not such a thing as a science of life; whether method, economy, and fertility of expedients be not applicable to enjoyment; and whether there be not a want of dexterity in pleasure which renders our little scantling of happiness still less; and a profuseness, an intoxication in bliss, which leads to satiety, disgust, and self-abhorrence. There is not a doubt but that health, talents, character, decent competency, respectable friends, are real, substantial blessings; and yet do we not daily see those who enjoy many or all of these good things, contrive, notwithstanding, to be as unhappy as others to whose lot few of them have fallen! I believe one great source of this mistake or misconduct is owing to a certain stimulus, with us called ambition, which goads us up the hill of life—not as we ascend other eminences, for the laudable curiosity of viewing an extended landscape—but rather for the dishonest pride of looking down on others of our fellow-creatures seemingly diminutive in humbler stations, &c. &c.

Sunday, 14th February 1790.

God help me! I am now obliged to join

‘Night to day, and Sunday to the week.’

If there be any truth in the orthodox faith of these churches, I am — past redemption, and, what is worse, — to all eternity. I am deeply read in *Boston's Fourfold State*, *Marshall on Sanctification*, *Guthrie's Trial of a Saving Interest*, &c.; but ‘there is no balm in Gilead, there is no physician there’ for me; so I shall e'en turn Arminian, and trust to ‘sincere though imperfect obedience.’

Tuesday, 16th.

LUCKILY for me, I was prevented from the discussion of the knotty point at which I had just made a full stop. All my fears and cares are of this world: if there is another, an honest man has nothing to fear from it. I hate a man that wishes to be a deist; but I fear, every fair, unprejudiced inquirer must in some degree be a sceptic. It is not that there are any very staggering arguments against the immortality of man; but, like electricity, phlogiston, &c. the subject is so involved in darkness that we want data to go upon. One thing frightens me much: that we are to live for ever seems *too good news to be true*. That we are to enter into a new scene of existence, where, exempt from want and pain, we shall enjoy ourselves and our friends without satiety or separation—how much should I be indebted to any one who could fully assure me that this was certain!

My time is once more expired. I will write to Mr Cleghorn soon. God bless him and all his concerns! And may all the powers that preside over conviviality and friendship be present with all their

kindest influence when the bearer of this, Mr Syme, and you meet ! I wish I could also make one.

Finally, brethren, farewell ! Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are gentle, whatsoever things are charitable, whatsoever things are kind, think on these things, and think on R. B.

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TO MR PETER HILL.

ELLISLAND, 2d March 1790.

AT a late meeting of the Monkland Friendly Society, it was resolved to augment their library by the following books, which you are to send us as soon as possible:—*The Mirror, The Lounger, Man of Feeling, Man of the World* (these, for my own sake, I wish to have by the first carrier); *Knox's History of the Reformation*; *Rae's History of the Rebellion in 1715*; any good *History of the Rebellion in 1745*; *A Display of the Secession Act and Testimony*, by Mr Gib; *Hervey's Meditations*; *Beveridge's Thoughts*; and another copy of *Watson's Body of Divinity*. This last heavy performance is so much admired by many of our members, that they will not be content with one copy.

I wrote to Mr A. Masterton three or four months ago, to pay some money he owed me into your hands, and lately I wrote to you to the same purpose, but I have heard from neither one nor other of you.

In addition to the books I commissioned in my last, I want very much *An Index to the Excise Laws; or an Abridgment of all the Statutes now in force Relative to the Excise*: by Jellinger Symons. I want three copies of this book: if it is now to be had, cheap or dear, get it for me. An honest country neighbour of mine wants, too, a Family Bible—the larger the better, but second-handed, for he does not choose to give above ten shillings for the book. I want likewise for myself, as you can pick them up, second-handed or cheap copies of Otway's dramatic works, Ben Jonson's, Dryden's, Congreve's, Wycherley's, Vanbrugh's, Cibber's, or any dramatic works of the more modern Macklin, Garrick, Foote, Colman, or Sheridan. A good copy, too, of Molière in French I much want. Any other good dramatic authors in that language I want also; but comic authors chiefly, though I should wish to have Racine, Corneille, and Voltaire too. I am in no hurry for all or any of these, but if you accidentally meet with them very cheap, get them for me.

And now, to quit the dry walk of business, how do you do, my dear friend !—and how is Mrs Hill ? I trust, if now and then not so elegantly handsome, at least as amiable, and sings as divinely as ever. My good wife too has a charming 'wood-note wild;' now, could we four get anyway snugly together in a corner of the New Jerusalem (remember I bespeak your company there), you and I, though Heaven knows we are no singers, &c. —

I am out of all patience with this vile world for one thing. Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures, except in a few scoundrelly

instances. I do not think that avarice of the good things we chance to have is born with us ; but we are placed here amid so much nakedness, and hunger, and poverty, and want, that we are under a cursed necessity of studying selfishness in order that we may **EXIST** ! Still there are in every age a few souls that all the wants and woes of life cannot debase to selfishness, or even to the necessary alloy of caution and prudence. If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows, I am no saint—I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for ; but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes. Even the knaves who have injured me, I would oblige them ; though, to tell the truth, it would be more out of vengeance, to shew them that I was independent of and above them, than out of the overflowings of my benevolence. Adieu !

R. B.

Whatever may be thought of Burns's letters, it is certainly in them that we get the most intimate and penetrating glances at his own nature. Some passages in the above epistle, for instance, are like the lightning-flash on a dark and turbid sea. He feels so intensely the hateful character of worldly selfishness, that he cannot help priding himself on his want of the alloy of caution and prudence. His sense of sin is strongly pressed on his mind, but it is lightened by the consciousness of a boundless philanthropy. And yet, too, he would only benefit the knaves of the earth to shew his sense of superiority over them, thus inflicting upon them the vengeance of a humiliation. To such men as Hill, who, like himself, could use some licence in thought and speech, he is frank in the strain of comment and the selection of terms. It is curious to see how, in his communications to the refined and pious Mrs Dunlop, the caution and prudence which he disclaimed, or at least the tact of a man of the world, exercised some restrictive influence over his pen. Thus it is that in a single page, we have the poet almost unconsciously revealing his pride with his benevolence, his abjuration of and his bondage to prudence. The ensuing letter is remarkable for the confession it contains, that he felt high endowments to be a disqualification for the common struggles of the world:—

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 10th April 1790.

I HAVE just now, my ever-honoured friend, enjoyed a very high luxury, in reading a paper of the *Lounger*. You know my national prejudices. I had often read and admired the *Spectator*, *Adventurer*, *Rambler*, and *World* ; but still with a certain regret that they were so thoroughly and entirely English. Alas ! have I often said to myself, what are all the boasted advantages which my country reaps

from the Union that can counterbalance the annihilation of her independence, and even her very name! I often repeat that couplet of my favourite poet, Goldsmith:

—— ‘States of native liberty possess,  
Though very poor, may yet be very blest.’

Nothing can reconcile me to the common terms English ambassador, English court, &c.; and I am out of all patience to see that equivocal character, Hastings, impeached by ‘the Commons of England.’ Tell me, my friend, is this weak prejudice? I believe in my conscience such ideas as ‘My country; her independence; her honour; the illustrious names that mark the history of my native land,’ &c.—I believe these, among your *men of the world*—men who, in fact, guide for the most part and govern our world—are looked on as so many modifications of wrong-headedness. They know the use of bawling out such terms, to rouse or lead THE RABBLE; but for their own private use, with almost all the *able statesmen* that ever existed or now exist, when they talk of right and wrong they only mean proper and improper; and their measure of conduct is not what they OUGHT, but what they DARE. For the truth of this I shall not ransack the history of nations, but appeal to one of the ablest judges of men that ever lived—the celebrated Earl of Chesterfield. In fact, a man who could thoroughly control his vices whenever they interfered with his interests, and who could completely put on the appearance of every virtue as often as it suited his purposes, is, on the Stanhopian plan, the *perfect man*; a man to lead nations. But are great abilities, complete without a flaw, and polished without a blemish, the standard of human excellence? This is certainly the stanch opinion of *men of the world*; but I call on honour, virtue, and worth to give the Stygian doctrine a loud negative! However, this must be allowed—that if you abstract from man the idea of an existence beyond the grave, then the true measure of human conduct is, *proper and improper*; virtue and vice, as dispositions of the heart are in that case of scarcely the same import and value to the world at large as harmony and discord in the modifications of sound; and a delicate sense of honour, like a nice ear for music, though it may sometimes give the possessor an ecstasy unknown to the coarser organs of the herd, yet, considering the harsh gratings and inharmonic jars in this ill-tuned state of being, it is odds but the individual would be as happy, and certainly would be as much respected by the true judges of society as it would then stand, without either a good ear or a good heart.

You must know I have just met with the *Mirror* and *Lounger* for the first time, and I am quite in raptures with them; I should be glad to have your opinion of some of the papers. The one I have just read, *Lounger*, No. 61, has cost me more honest tears than anything I have read of a long time.<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie has been called the

<sup>1</sup> This paper relates to attachments between servants and masters, and concludes with the story of Albert Bana.



Addison of the Scots, and, in my opinion, Addison would not be hurt at the comparison. If he has not Addison's exquisite humour, he as certainly outdoes him in the tender and the pathetic. His *Man of Feeling*—but I am not counsel-learned in the laws of criticism—I estimate as the first performance in its kind I ever saw. From what book, moral or even pious, will the susceptible young mind receive impressions more congenial to humanity and kindness, generosity and benevolence—in short, more of all that ennobles the soul to herself, or endears her to others—than from the simple, affecting tale of poor Harley?

Still, with all my admiration of Mackenzie's writings, I do not know if they are the fittest reading for a young man who is about to set out, as the phrase is, to make his way into life. Do not you think, madam, that among the few favoured of Heaven in the structure of their minds—for such there certainly are—there may be a purity, a tenderness, a dignity, an elegance of soul, which are of no use, nay, in some degree absolutely disqualifying, for the truly important business of making a man's way into life! If I am not much mistaken, my gallant young friend A \* \* \* \* \*<sup>1</sup> is very much under these disqualifications; and for the young females of a family I could mention, well may they excite parental solicitude, for I, a common acquaintance, or, as my vanity will have it, a humble friend, have often trembled for a turn of mind which may render them eminently happy or peculiarly miserable!

I have been manufacturing some verses lately; but as I have got the most hurried season of Excise business over, I hope to have more leisure to transcribe anything that may shew how much I have the honour to be, madam, yours, &c.

R. B

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TO DR MOORE.

DUMFRIES, EXCISE-OFFICE, 14th July 1780.

SIR—Coming into town this morning to attend my duty in this office, it being collection-day, I met with a gentleman who tells me he is on his way to London; so I take the opportunity of writing to you, as franking is at present under a temporary death. I shall have some snatches of leisure through the day amid our horrid business and bustle, and I shall improve them as well as I can; but let my letter be as stupid as \* \* \* \* \*, as miscellaneous as a newspaper, as short as a hungry grace-before-meat, or as long as a law-paper in the Douglas cause; as ill-spelt as country John's billet-doux, or as unsightly a scrawl as Betty Byre-Mucker's answer to it; I hope, considering circumstances, you will forgive it; and as it will put you to no expense of postage, I shall have the less reflection about it.

I am sadly ungrateful in not returning you my thanks for your most valuable present, *Zeluco*. In fact, you are in some degree

<sup>1</sup> Probably Anthony, a son of Mrs Dunlop, is here meant.

blameable for my neglect. You were pleased to express a wish for my opinion of the work, which so flattered me, that nothing less would serve my overweening fancy than a formal criticism on the book. In fact, I have gravely planned a comparative view of you, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett, in your different qualities and merits as novel-writers. This, I own, betrays my ridiculous vanity, and I may probably never bring the business to bear; but I am fond of the spirit young Elihu shews in the book of Job: 'And I said, I will also declare my opinion.' I have quite disfigured my copy of the book with my annotations. I never take it up without at the same time taking my pencil, and marking with asterisms, parentheses, &c. wherever I meet with an original thought, a nervous remark on life and manners, a remarkable, well-turned period, or a character sketched with uncommon precision.

Though I should hardly think of fairly writing out my 'Comparative View,' I shall certainly trouble you with my remarks, such as they are.

I have just received from my gentleman that horrid summons in the book of Revelation—'That time shall be no more!'

The little collection of sonnets have some charming poetry in them. If *indeed* I am indebted to the fair author for the book,<sup>1</sup> and not, as I rather suspect, to a celebrated author of the other sex, I should certainly have written to the lady, with my grateful acknowledgments, and my own ideas of the comparative excellence of her pieces. I would do this last, not from any vanity of thinking that my remarks could be of much consequence to Mrs Smith, but merely from my own feelings as an author, doing as I would be done by.

R. B.

The canvass for the Dumfries burghs had been proceeding with excessive vigour all this spring, and when the election at length took place in July, the agitation and fervour of the public mind in the district exceeded everything of the kind previously known. The influence of the Duke of Queensberry on the Whig side proved too much for the merits of excellent 'Westerhall,' and the dismissal of his Grace from the bed-chamber was revenged on Pitt by the return of Captain Miller. In a spirited verse-epistle on the subject, addressed to his friend Mr Graham, Burns still shews, under an affected impartiality, his Tory and even cavalier leanings.

#### EPISTLE TO MR GRAHAM OF FINTRY.

Fintry, my stay in worldly strife,  
 Friend o' my Muse, friend o' my life,  
 Are ye as idle's I am?  
 Come then, wi' uncouth, kintra fleg,  
 O'er Pegasus I'll fling my leg,  
 And ye shall see me try him.

vagary

<sup>1</sup> This book was the Sonnets of Charlotte Smith

I'll sing the zeal Drumlanrig<sup>1</sup> bears,  
 Who left the all-important cares  
     Of princes and their darlings;  
 And, bent on winning borough towns,  
 Came shaking hands wi' wabster loons,  
     And kissing barefit carlins.

women

Combustion through our boroughs rode,  
 Whistling his roaring pack abroad,  
     Of mad, unmuzzled lions;  
 As Queensberry buff and blue<sup>2</sup> unfurled,  
 And Westerha<sup>3</sup> and Hopetoun<sup>3</sup> hurled  
     To every Whig defiance.

But Queensberry, cautious, left the war,  
 The unmannered dust might soil his star,  
     Besides, he hated bleeding;  
 But left behind him heroes bright,  
 Heroes in Cæsarean fight  
     Or Ciceronian pleading.

O for a throat like huge Mons-Meg,<sup>4</sup>  
 To muster o'er each ardent Whig  
     Beneath Drumlanrig's banners;  
 Heroes and heroines commix  
 All in the field of politics,  
     To win immortal honours.

M'Murdo<sup>5</sup> and his lovely spouse  
 (Th' enamoured laurels kiss her brows)  
     Led on the loves and graces;  
 She won each gaping burgess' heart,  
 While he, all-conquering, played his part,  
     Among their wives and lasses.

Craigdarroch<sup>6</sup> led a light-armed corps;  
 Tropes, metaphors, and figures pour,  
     Like Hecla streaming thunder;  
 Glenriddel,<sup>7</sup> skilled in rusty coins,  
 Blew up each Tory's dark designs,  
     And bared the treason under.

<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Queensberry. Burns, for metre's sake, uses his Grace's second title.

<sup>2</sup> The livery of Mr Fox.

<sup>3</sup> The Earl of Hopetoun.

<sup>4</sup> A piece of ordnance of extraordinary structure and magnitude, founded in the reign of James IV. of Scotland, about the end of the fifteenth century, and which is still exhibited, though in an infirm state, in Edinburgh Castle. The diameter of the bore is twenty inches.

<sup>5</sup> The duke's chamberlain, a friend of Burns.

<sup>6</sup> Mr Fergusson of Craigdarroch; the victor of the Whistle-contest.

<sup>7</sup> Captain Riddel of Glenriddel.

In either wing two champions fought,  
 Redoubted Staig,<sup>1</sup> who set at nought  
     The wildest savage Tory,  
 And Welsh,<sup>2</sup> who ne'er yet flinched his ground,  
 High waved his magnum bonum round  
     With Cyclopean fury.

Miller<sup>3</sup> brought up the artillery ranks,  
 The many-pounders of the Banks,  
     Resistless desolation;  
 While Maxwellton,<sup>4</sup> that baron bold,  
 Mid Lawson's port entrenched his hold,  
     And threatened worse damnation.

To these, what Tory hosts opposed;  
 With these, what Tory warriors closed,  
     Surpasses my describing:  
 Squadrons extended long and large,  
 With furious speed rushed to the charge,  
     Like raging devils driving.

What verse can sing, what prose narrate,  
 The butcher deeds of bloody fate  
     Amid this mighty tulzie!  
 Grim Horror grinned; pale Terror roared,  
 As Murder at his thrapple shored;  
     And hell mixt in the brulgie!

conflict

threatened  
broll

As Highland crags, by thunder cleft,  
 When lightnings fire the stormy lift,  
     Hurl down wi' crashing rattle;  
 As flames amang a hundred woods;  
 As headlong foam a hundred floods;  
     Such is the rage of battle.

firmament

The stubborn Tories dare to die;  
 As soon the rooted oaks would fly,  
     Before th' approaching fellers;  
 The Whigs come on like Ocean's roar,  
 When all his wintry billows pour  
     Against the Buchan Bullers.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Provost of Dumfries.

<sup>2</sup> The sheriff of the county.

<sup>3</sup> Mr Miller of Dalswinton, father of the candidate. He had been a banker.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Robert Lawrie, M.P. for the county.

<sup>5</sup> The 'Bullers of Buchan' is an appellation given to a tremendous rocky recess on the Aberdeenshire coast, near Peterhead—having an opening to the sea, while the top is open. The sea, constantly raging in it, gives it the appearance of a pot or boiler, and hence the name.

Lo, from the shades of Death's deep night,  
 Departed Whigs enjoy the fight,  
 And think on former daring !  
 The muffled murderer of Charles<sup>1</sup>  
 The Magna-Charta flag unfurls,  
 All deadly gules its bearing.

Nor wanting ghosts of Tory fame ;  
 Bold Scrimgeour<sup>2</sup> follows gallant Grahame<sup>3</sup>—  
 Auld Covenanters shiver—  
 (Forgive, forgive, much-wronged Montrose !  
 While death and hell engulf thy foes,  
 Thou liv'st on high for ever !)

Still o'er the field the combat burns ;  
 The Tories, Whigs, give way by turns ;  
 But fate the word has spoken—  
 For woman's wit, or strength of man,  
 Alas ! can do but what they can—  
 The Tory ranks are broken.

O that my een were flowing burns !  
 My voice a lioness that mourns  
 Her darling cub's undoing !  
 That I might greet, that I might cry,  
 While Tories fall, while Tories fly,  
 And furious Whigs pursuing !

What Whig but wails the good Sir James ;  
 Dear to his country by the names  
 Friend, Patron, Benefactor !  
 Not Pulteney's wealth can Pulteney save !  
 And Hopetoun falls, the generous, brave !  
 And Stuart bold as Hector !

Thou, Pitt, shall rue this overthrow,  
 And Thurlow growl a curse of wo,  
 And Melville melt in wailing !  
 Now Fox and Sheridan, rejoice !  
 And Burke shall sing : ' O prince, arise !  
 Thy power is all-prevailing !'

For your poor friend, the Bard afar,  
 He hears, and only hears the war,  
 A cool spectator purely ;  
 So when the storm the forest rends,  
 The robin in the hedge descends,  
 And sober chirps securely.

<sup>1</sup> The masked executioner of Charles I.

<sup>2</sup> John, Earl of Dundee, noted for his zeal and sufferings in the cause of the Stuarts during the time of the Commonwealth.

<sup>3</sup> The great Marquis of Montrose.

TO MR MURDOCH, TEACHER OF FRENCH, LONDON.

ELLISLAND, 16th July 1790.

MY DEAR SIR—I received a letter from you a long time ago, but unfortunately, as it was in the time of my peregrinations and journeyings through Scotland, I mislaid or lost it, and by consequence your direction along with it. Luckily, my good star brought me acquainted with Mr Kennedy, who, I understand, is an acquaintance of yours; and by his means and mediation I hope to replace that link which my unfortunate negligence had so unluckily broke in the chain of our correspondence. I was the more vexed at the vile accident, as my brother William, a journeyman saddler, has been for some time in London, and wished above all things for your direction, that he might have paid his respects to his father's friend.

His last address he sent to me was, 'Wm. Burns, at Mr Barber's, saddler, No. 181 Strand.' I writ him by Mr Kennedy, but neglected to ask him for your address; so, if you find a spare half minute, please let my brother know by a card where and when he will find you, and the poor fellow will joyfully wait on you, as one of the few surviving friends of the man whose name, and Christian name too, he has the honour to bear.

The next letter I write you shall be a long one. I have much to tell you of 'hairbreadth 'scapes in th' imminent deadly breach,' with all the eventful history of a life, the early years of which owed so much to your kind tutorage; but this at an hour of leisure. My kindest compliments to Mrs Murdoch and family. I am ever, my dear sir, your obliged friend,

R. B.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'This letter was communicated to the editor [Cromek] by a gentleman, to whose liberal advice and information he is much indebted—Mr John Murdoch, the tutor of the poet—accompanied by the following interesting note:—

"LONDON, HART STREET, BLOOMSBURY, 28th Dec. 1807.

DEAR SIR—The following letter, which I lately found among my papers, I copy for your perusal, partly because it is Burns's, partly because it makes honourable mention of my rational Christian friend, his father; and likewise because it is rather flattering to myself. I glory in no one thing so much as an intimacy with good men—the friendship of others reflects no honour. When I recollect the pleasure—and I hope benefit—I received from the conversation of WILLIAM BURNS, especially when on the Lord's Day we walked together for about two miles to the house of prayer, there publicly to adore and praise the Giver of all good, I entertain an ardent hope that together we shall 'renew the glorious theme in distant worlds,' with powers more adequate to the mighty subject—THE EXUBERANT BENEFICENCE OF THE GREAT CREATOR. But to the letter:—[Here follows the letter relative to young William Burns.]

I promised myself a deal of happiness in the conversation of my dear young friend; but my promises of this nature generally prove fallacious. Two visits were the utmost that I received. At one of them, however, he repeated a lesson which I had given him about twenty years before, when he was a mere child, concerning the pity and tenderness due to animals. To that lesson, which it seems was brought to the level of his capacity, he declared himself indebted for almost all the philanthropy he possessed.

Let not parents and teachers imagine that it is needless to talk seriously to children. They are sooner fit to be reasoned with than is generally thought. Strong and indelible impressions are to be made before the mind be agitated and ruffled

TO MR M'MURDO.

ELLISLAND, 2d August 1790.

SIR—Now that you are over with the sirens of Flattery, the harpies of Corruption, and the furies of Ambition—these infernal deities that on all sides, and in all parties, preside over the villanous business of politics—permit a rustic Muse of your acquaintance to do her best to soothe you with a song.

You knew Henderson—I have not flattered his memory. I have the honour to be, sir, your obliged, humble servant, R. B.

Burns here alludes to an elegy he had composed upon an Edinburgh friend not as yet noticed. Matthew Henderson appears to have been a 'man about town,' a kind-hearted, life-enjoying person, of agreeable manners and upright character. Allan Cunningham states, on the authority of Sir Thomas Wallace, who is represented as having known him, 'that he dined regularly at Fortune's Tavern, and was a member of the Capillaire Club, which was composed of all who inclined to be witty and joyous.' There is a sad want of documentary or contemporary evidence about him; I have searched the obituaries in vain for his death. Hence there might almost be a justifiable doubt of his having ever existed. His reality is, however, beyond a doubt. A private letter written in Edinburgh in February 1787, besides alluding to Burns as the lion of the day, speaks of several gentlemen who had been spoken of as fit to undertake the Mastership of Ceremonies at the Assemblies. 'I heard of two or three people as being mentioned by others, who never, I daresay, thought of it for themselves—as, for instance, Haggart and *Matthew Henderson*. Would Matthew leave his friend and bottle to go bow at an Assembly?'<sup>1</sup> This reveals not merely his existence, but his character. He had been one of Burns's good-fellow friends during the time he spent in Edinburgh, and he appears as a subscriber for four copies of the second edition of our bard's poems—not, however, as *Captain* Matthew Henderson—but as 'Matthew Henderson, Esq.,' the 'Captain' being, we understand, a mere pet-name for the man among his friends, adopted most likely from the position he held in some convivial society. Burns speaks of the poem as 'a tribute to the memory of a man I loved much.'

by the numerous train of distracting cares and unruly passions, whereby it is frequently rendered almost unsusceptible of the principles and precepts of rational religion and sound morality.

But I find myself digressing again. Poor William! then in the bloom and vigour of youth, caught a putrid fever, and in a few days, as real chief mourner, I followed his remains to the land of forgetfulness.

JOHN MURDOCH.

—CRAMER.

<sup>1</sup> The letter is printed entire in the *Scottish Journal*, Dec. 11, 1847. T. G. Stevenson, Edinburgh.

ON CAPTAIN MATTHEW HENDERSON,

A GENTLEMAN WHO HELD THE PATENT FOR HIS HONOURS IMMEDIATELY FROM  
ALMIGHTY GOD.

'Should the poor be flattered?'—SHAKESPEAR.

But now his radiant corpse is run,  
 For Matthew's course was bright:  
 His soul was like the glorious sun,  
 A matchless, heavenly light!

O Death! thou tyrant fell and bloody!  
 The meikle devil wi' a woodie rope  
 Haur! thee hame to his black smiddie,  
     O'er hurcheon hides, hedgehog  
 And like stockfish come o'er his studdie  
     Wi' thy auld sides!

He's gane! he's gane! he's frae us torn,  
 The ae best fellow e'er was born!  
 Thee, Matthew, Nature's sel' shall mourn  
     By wood and wild,  
 Where, haply, Pity strays forlorn,  
     Frae man exiled!

Ye hills! near neibors o' the starns,  
 That proudly cock your cresting cairns!  
 Ye cliffs, the haunts of sailing yearns, eagles  
     Where echo slumbers!  
 Come join, ye Nature's sturdiest bairns,  
     My wailing numbers!

Mourn, ilka grove the cushat kens! wood-pigeon  
 Ye hazelly shaws and briery dens!  
 Ye burnies, wimplin' down your glens,  
     Wi' toddlin' din, purling  
 Or foaming strang, wi' hasty stens, leaps  
     Frae lin to lin! pool

Mourn, little harebells o'er the lea;  
 Ye stately foxgloves fair to see;  
 Ye woodbines, hanging bonnilie,  
     In scented bowers;  
 Ye roses on your thorny tree,  
     The first o' flowers.

At dawn, when every grassy blade  
 Droops with a diamond at its head,  
 At even, when beans their fragrance shed,  
     I' th' rustling gale,  
 Ye mankins whiddin through the glade, hares skipping  
     Come join my wail.



Mourn, ye wee songsters o' the wood;  
 Ye grouse that crap the heather bud;  
 Ye curlews calling through a clud;  
     Ye whistling plover;  
 And mourn, ye whirring pattrick brood!—  
     He's gane for ever!

Mourn, sooty coots, and speckled teals,  
 Ye fisher herons, watching eels;  
 Ye duck and drake, wi' airy wheels  
     Circling the lake;  
 Ye bitterns, till the quagmire reels,  
     Rair for his sake.

Mourn, clam'ring craiks at close o' day,      *land-rails*  
 'Mang fields o' flowering clover gay;  
 And when ye wing your annual way  
     Frae our cauld shore,  
 Tell thae far warlds, wha lies in clay  
     Wham we deplore.

Ye houlets, frae your ivy bower,      *owls*  
 In some auld tree or eldritch tower,      *dismal*  
 What time the moon, wi' silent glower      *stare*  
     Sets up her horn,  
 Wail through the dreary midnight hour  
     Till waukrife morn!

O rivers, forests, hills, and plains!  
 Oft have ye heard my canty strains:  
 But now, what else for me remains  
     But tales of wo!  
 And frae my een the drapping rains  
     Maun ever flow.

Mourn, Spring, thou darling of the year!  
 Ilk cowslip cup shall kep a tear:      *receive*  
 Thou, Simmer, while each corny spear  
     Shoots up its head,  
 Thy gay, green, flowery tresses shear  
     For him that's dead.

Thou, Autumn, wi' thy yellow hair,  
 In grief thy sallow mantle tear!  
 Thou, Winter, hurling through the air  
     The roaring blast,  
 Wide o'er the naked world declare  
     The worth we've lost!

Mourn him, thou Sun, great source of light !  
 Mourn, empress of the silent night !  
 And you, ye twinkling starnies bright,  
     My Matthew mourn !  
 For through your orbs he's ta'en his flight,  
     Ne'er to return.

O Henderson ! the man—the brother !  
 And art thou gone, and gone for ever !  
 And hast thou crossed that unknown river  
     Life's dreary bound ?  
 Like thee, where shall I find another,  
     The world around ?

Go to your sculptured tombs ye great,  
 In a' the tinsel trash o' state !  
 But by thy honest turf I'll wait,  
     Thou man of worth !  
 And weep the ae best fellow's fate  
     E'er lay in earth.

## THE EPITAPH.

Stop, passenger !—my story's brief,  
 And truth I shall relate, man ;  
 I tell nae common tale o' grief—  
     For Matthew was a great man.

If thou uncommon merit hast,  
 Yet spurned at Fortune's door, man,  
 A look of pity hither cast—  
     For Matthew was a poor man.

If thou a noble sodger art,  
 That passest by this grave, man,  
 There moulders here a gallant heart—  
     For Matthew was a brave man.

If thou on men, their works and ways,  
 Canst throw uncommon light, man,  
 Here lies wha weel had won thy praise—  
     For Matthew was a bright man.

If thou at friendship's sacred ca'  
 Wad life itself resign, man,  
 Thy sympathetic tear maun fa'—  
     For Matthew was a kind man.

If thou art stanch without a stain,  
Like the unchanging blue, man,  
This was a kinsman o' thy ain—  
For Matthew was a true man.

If thou hast wit, and fun, and fire,  
And ne'er guid wine did fear, man,  
This was thy billie, dam, and sire—  
For Matthew was a queer man.

If ony whiggish whingin' sot,  
To blame poor Matthew dare, man,  
May dool and sorrow be his lot!  
For Matthew was a rare man.

peevish

---

TO MRS DUNLOP.

8th August 1790.

DEAR MADAM—After a long day's toil, plague, and care, I sit down to write to you. Ask me not why I have delayed it so long? It was owing to hurry, indolence, and fifty other things; in short, to anything but forgetfulness of *la plus aimable de son sexe*. By the by, you are indebted your best courtesy to me for this last compliment, as I pay it from my sincere conviction of its truth—a quality rather rare in compliments of these grinning, bowing, scraping times.

Well, I hope writing to *you* will ease a little my troubled soul. Sorely has it been bruised to-day! A *ci-devant* friend of mine, and an intimate acquaintance of yours, has given my feelings a wound that I perceive will gangrene dangerously ere it's cure. He has wounded my pride! \* \* \* \* R. B.

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TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 8th August 1790.

FORGIVE me, my once dear, and ever dear friend, my seeming negligence. You cannot sit down and fancy the busy life I lead.

I laid down my goose-feather to beat my brains for an apt simile, and had some thoughts of a country grannum at a family christening; a bride on the market-day before her marriage; an orthodox clergyman at a Paisley sacrament \* \* \* ; or a tavern-keeper at an election dinner \* \* \* ; but the resemblance that hits my fancy best is, that blackguard miscreant, Satan, who, &c. &c. roams about like a roaring lion, seeking, *searching*<sup>1</sup> whom he may devour. However, tossed about as I am, if I choose—and who would not choose?—to bind down with

<sup>1</sup> Searching is apparently used by the bard in a professional sense; namely, Satan searches after the manner of a busy exciseman.

the crampets of attention the brazen foundation of integrity, I may rear up the superstructure of independence, and from its daring turrets bid defiance to the storms of fate. And is not this a 'consummation devoutly to be wished'?

Thy spirit, Independence, let me share;  
Lord of the lion-heart and eagle-eye!  
Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,  
Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky!

Are not these noble verses? They are the introduction of Smollett's *Ode to Independence*: if you have not seen the poem, I will send it to you. How wretched is the man that hangs on by the favours of the great! To shrink from every dignity of man, at the approach of a lordly piece of self-consequence, who, amid all his tinsel glitter and stately hauteur, is but a creature formed as thou art—and perhaps not so well formed as thou art—came into the world a puling infant as thou didst, and must go out of it as all men must—a naked corse. \* \* \*

R. B.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly no invidious observer could now say of Burns that he indulged in a poetic indolence. On the contrary, he was manfully, though perhaps imprudently, attempting to do the work of a plurality of men. His farm must of course have required some attention, even though nearly the whole of the work was done by servants. Then he had to see the interests of the revenue protected throughout ten parishes. Over this ground he had to ride at an average two hundred miles a week. He, moreover, wrote letters and poems, and paid some attention to the moral interests of his household. The motive of all this activity was the honourable one of a desire to maintain his family and be 'behadden to naeboddy.' Such being the case, it is a great mistake to think of Burns as one entirely deficient in the qualities of a man of the world. He was now undoubtedly manifesting several of the most important, as diligence, perseverance, and accuracy in the details of business.<sup>2</sup> It has been stated that his household

<sup>1</sup> 'The preceding letter explains the feelings under which this was written. The strain of indignant invective goes on some time longer in the style which our bard was too apt to indulge, and of which the reader has already seen so much.'—CURRIE. The writing of two letters in one day appears inconsistent with the alleged hurry of the poet's life; but the 8th of August 1790 was a Sunday. Therefore the exception rather confirms the rule.

<sup>2</sup> Burns certainly disliked the drudgery of common worldly affairs; and it is little to be wondered at; but this just increases his merit in undertaking and performing the business which it was his lot to have placed before him. In Colonel Fullerton's *Vues of Agriculture in Ayrshire*, 1798, there is a compliment to Burns on a purely technical matter, which will read strangely to many of his admirers. 'In order,' says the colonel, 'to prevent the danger arising from horned cattle in studs and strawyards, the best mode is to cut out the budding knob, or root of the horn, while the calf is very young. This was suggested to me by Mr Robert Burns, whose general talents are no less conspicuous than the poetic powers which have done so much honour to the county where he was born.'

was managed laxly, and in a style of ruinous indulgence towards the servants;<sup>1</sup> but, on careful inquiry, I am satisfied that Dr Currie is nearer the truth when he speaks of 'the uniform prudence and good-management of Mrs Burns.' What seems to have given rise to the former notion is, that the Ayrshire dietary for servants, which Burns naturally carried with him, was more liberal than that of Dumfriesshire, and hence appeared to his neighbours as somewhat extravagant. No doubt, also, Burns was now and then led to spend a few evening hours over the bowl with his friends; but these were perhaps the sole examples of relaxation which occurred in his laborious life, and he would be a Puritan indeed who could grudge them to him. In short, the life of Burns at this time was on the whole a respectable life, both in respect of the positive qualities of industrious application and punctual discharge of duty, and the negative one of inoffensiveness towards society. It shews satisfactorily enough that there was nothing in Burns himself to prevent him from acting the decent master of a household, and all other conventionalities which the world could desire.

A few years ago (1838), there lived on the farm of Enrick, near Gatehouse of Fleet, a respectable working-man named William Clark, who had been ploughman to Burns for six months at Ellisland. The testimony of an intelligent man of this class, when not against his master, may assuredly be taken as readily as that of a person higher in the social scale. It was to the following effect, as reported by a gentleman residing near Kirkcudbright:—

'Soon after Burns became tenant of Ellisland, William Clark lived with him as servant during the winter half-year, he thinks, of 1789-90. . . . Burns kept two men and two women servants; but he invariably, when at home, took his meals with his wife and family in the little parlour. Clark thought he was as good a manager of land as the generality of the farmers in the neighbourhood. The farm of Ellisland was said to be moderately rented, and was susceptible of much improvement, had improvement been in repute. Burns sometimes visited the neighbouring farmers, and they returned the compliment; but that way of spending time and exchanging civilities was not so common then as now, and, besides, the most of the people thereabouts had no expectation that Burns's conduct and writings would be so much noticed afterwards. Burns kept nine or ten milch cows, some young cattle, four horses, and several pet sheep: of the latter he was very fond. During the winter and spring time, when he was not

<sup>1</sup> Life of Burns by Allan Cunningham.

engaged with the Excise business, he occasionally held the plough for an hour or so for him (William Clark), and was a fair workman, though the mode of ploughing now-a-days is much superior in many respects. During seed-time, Burns might be frequently seen, at an early hour, in the fields with his sowing-sheet; but as business often required his attention from home, he did not sow the whole of the grain. He was a kind and indulgent master, and spoke familiarly to his servants, both in the house and out of it, though, if anything put him out of humour, he was *gay guldersonne for a wee while*: the storm was soon over, and there was never a word of *upcast* afterwards. Clark never saw him really angry but once, and it was occasioned by the carelessness of one of the woman-servants who had not cut potatoes small enough, which brought one of the cows into danger of being choked. His looks, gestures, and voice on that occasion were terrible: W. C. was glad to be out of his sight, and when they met again Burns was perfectly calm. If any extra work was to be done, the men sometimes got a dram; but Clark had lived with masters who were more *flush* in that way to their servants. Clark, during the six months he spent at Ellisland, never once saw his master intoxicated or incapable of managing his own business. . . . Burns, when at home, usually wore a broad blue bonnet, a blue or drab long-tailed coat, corduroy breeches, dark-blue stockings, and *cootikens*, and in cold weather a black-and-white-checked plaid wrapped round his shoulders. Mrs Burns was a good and prudent housewife, kept everything in neat and tidy order, was well liked by the servants, for whom she provided abundance of wholesome food. At parting, Burns gave Clark a certificate of character, and, besides paying his wages in full, gave him a shilling for a *fairing*.

Two documents, conveying some idea of Burns's mode of conducting himself in business-arrangements with his inferiors, were lately turned up in Dumfries. The first is a letter to Mr David Newal, writer in that town, who was factor on the Dalswinton estate: it refers to the forming of a drain, which it would appear that Burns and his landlord were to pay in common; and short as it is, and relating to a matter so commonplace, the character of the writer nevertheless peeps out:—

DR SIR—Enclosed is a state of the account between you and me and James Halliday respecting the drain. I have stated it at 20d. per rood, as, in fact, even at that, they have not the wages they ought to have had, and I cannot for the soul of me see a poor devil a loser at my hand.

Humanity, I hope, as well as Charity, will cover a multitude of

sins ; a mantle of which—between you and me—I have some little need. I am, sir, yours,  
R. B.

Enclosed in this letter is an account in Burns's handwriting between himself and D. Halliday, inferring a debit of £10, 17s. 3d. for wages and the building of a yard-dike, and a credit of £11, 1s. 6d., composed of so much in cash, so much in meal and cheese, and certain other sums paid for Halliday. This account does not appear to be that referred to in the letter to Mr Newal: it seems to be merely a memorandum of the state of D. Halliday's wages at the Martinmas term. It contains, however, equally characteristic matter, for the poet makes an error of summation to the extent of 5s. in Halliday's favour, and overpays him 4s. 3d. besides. As to this 'poor devil,' too, he took special care that he 'should not be a loser at his hand.'

His friend Mr Ramsay of Ochertyre paid him a visit in the course of a tour this summer or autumn, in company with the Rev. Mr Stewart of Iuss. To quote a letter of Mr Ramsay to Dr Currie:—

'Seeing him pass quickly near Closeburn, I said to my companion: "That is Burns." On coming to the inn the ostler told us he would be back in a few hours to grant permits; that where he met with anything seizable he was no better than any other gauger: in everything else that he was perfectly a gentleman. After leaving a note to be delivered to him on his return, I proceeded to his house, being curious to see his Jean, &c. I was much pleased with his *uxor Sabina qualis*,<sup>1</sup> and the poet's modest mansion, so unlike the habitation of ordinary rustics. In the evening he suddenly bounced in upon us, and said, as he entered: "I come, to use the words of Shakspeare, *stewed in haste*." In fact, he had ridden incredibly fast after receiving my note. We fell into conversation directly, and soon got into the *mare magnum* of poetry. He told me that he had now gotten a story for a drama, which he was to call *Rob Macquechan's Elshon*, from a popular story of Robert Bruce being defeated on the Water of Cairn, when the heel of his boot having loosened in his flight, he applied to Robert Macquechan to fit it, who, to make sure, ran his awl nine inches up the king's heel. We were now going on at a great rate, when Mr S[tewart] popped in his head, which put

<sup>1</sup> The classical associations of Mr Ramsay would naturally carry his mind on this occasion to—

'Quòd si pudica mulier in partem juvet  
Domum atque dulces liberos  
(*Sabina qualis*, aut perusta solibus  
Pernicis *uxor Appuli*), &c.'

Hor. v. Od. 2.

a stop to our discourse, which had become very interesting. Yet in a little while it was resumed; and such was the force and versatility of the bard's genius, that he made the tears run down Mr S[tewart]'s cheeks, albeit unused to the poetic strain. \* \* \* From that time we met no more, and I was grieved at the reports of him afterwards. Poor Burns! we shall hardly ever see his like again. He was, in truth, a sort of comet in literature, irregular in its motions, which did not do good proportioned to the blaze of light it displayed.'

An equally competent observer—the late Sir Egerton Brydges—paid a visit to Burns about the same time; and many years after he thus reported his recollections of what passed:—

'I had always been a great admirer of his genius and of many traits in his character; and I was aware that he was a person moody and somewhat difficult to deal with. I was resolved to keep in full consideration the irritability of his position in society. About a mile from his residence, on a bench, under a tree, I passed a figure, which from the engraved portraits of him I did not doubt was the poet; but I did not venture to address him. On arriving at his humble cottage, Mrs Burns opened the door; she was the plain sort of humble woman she has been described: she ushered me into a neat apartment, and said that she would send for Burns, who was gone for a walk. In about half an hour he came, and my conjecture proved right: he was the person I had seen on the bench by the road-side. At first I was not entirely pleased with his countenance. I thought it had a sort of capricious jealousy, as if he was half inclined to treat me as an intruder. I resolved to bear it, and try if I could humour him. I let him choose his turn of conversation, but said a few words about the friend whose letter I had brought to him. It was now about four in the afternoon of an autumn day. While we were talking, Mrs Burns, as if accustomed to entertain visitors in this way, brought in a bottle of Scotch whisky, and set the table. I accepted this hospitality. I could not help observing the curious glance with which he watched me at the entrance of this signal of homely entertainment. He was satisfied; he filled our glasses: "Here's a health to auld Caledonia!" The fire sparkled in his eye, and mine sympathetically met his. He shook my hand with warmth, and we were friends at once. Then he drank "Erin for ever!" and the tear of delight burst from his eyes. The fountain of his mind and his heart now opened at once, and flowed with abundant force almost till midnight.

'He had amazing acuteness of intellect as well as glow of sentiment. I do not deny that he said some absurd things, and many coarse ones, and that his knowledge was very irregular, and



sometimes too presumptuous, and that he did not endure contradiction with sufficient patience. His pride, and perhaps his vanity, was even morbid. I carefully avoided topics in which he could not take an active part. Of literary gossip he knew nothing, and therefore I kept aloof from it: in the technical parts of literature his opinions were crude and uninformed; but whenever he spoke of a great writer whom he had read, his taste was generally sound. To a few minor writers he gave more credit than they deserved. His great beauty was his manly strength, and his energy and elevation of thought and feeling. He had always a full mind, and all flowed from a genuine spring. I never conversed with a man who appeared to be more warmly impressed with the beauties of nature: and visions of female beauty and tenderness seemed to transport him. He did not merely appear to be a poet at casual intervals; but at every moment a poetical enthusiasm seemed to beat in his veins, and he lived all his days the inward if not the outward life of a poet. I thought I perceived in Burns's cheek the symptoms of an energy which had been pushed too far; and he had this feeling himself. Every now and then he spoke of the grave as soon about to close over him. His dark eye had at first a character of sternness; but as he became warmed, though this did not entirely melt away, it was mingled with changes of extreme softness.<sup>1</sup>

If this was a laborious, it was also a hopeful time with Burns. He had only as yet been a twelvemonth in the service of the revenue, and already, by the kind interest of Mr Graham, his promotion to a supervisorship, inferring an income of £200 a year, was contemplated. So bright, indeed, were the prospects of the poet, that Nicol affected, or perhaps scarcely affected, to dread his forgetting his old friends, as appears from a characteristic letter of his to Mr Robert Ainslie, dated August 13, 1790:—‘As to Burns, poor folks like you and I must resign all thoughts of future correspondence with him. To the pride of applauded genius is now superadded the pride of office. He was lately raised to the dignity of an Examiner of Excise, which is a step preparative to attaining that of a *supervisor*. Therefore we can expect no less than that his language will become perfectly *Horatian*—“odi profanum vulgus et arceo.” However, I will see him in a fortnight hence; and if I find that Beelzebub has inflated his heart like a bladder with pride, and given it the fullest distension that vanity can effect, you and I will burn him in effigy, and write a satire, as bitter as gall and wormwood, against government for

<sup>1</sup> *Metropolitan Magazine*.

employing its *enemies*, like Lord North, to effect its purposes. This will be taking all the revenge in our power.' By rating Burns as an enemy of the government, Nicol could only refer to his predilection for the cause of the Stuarts. In no other respect had Burns as yet become liable even to the suspicion of a hostility to the existing powers.

In the autumn of 1790, Dr James Anderson, an agricultural and miscellaneous writer of merit, planned a small periodical work of an entertaining and instructive character, to be entitled *The Bee*. It commenced in December of this year, and was continued till January 1794, when it formed eighteen duodecimo volumes. Dr Anderson appears to have secured the good-natured interest of Dr Blacklock in behalf of his undertaking, and the blind poet is found in September to have addressed a playful poetical letter to Burns, entreating him to become a contributor :—

TO MR ROBERT BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 1st September [1790.]

How does my dear friend, much I languish to hear,  
His fortune, relations, and all that are dear ;  
With love of the Muses so strongly still smitten,  
I meant this epistle in verse to have written ;  
But from age and infirmity indolence flows,  
And this, much I fear, will restore me to prose.  
Anon to my business I wish to proceed,  
Dr Anderson guides and provokes me to speed—  
A man of integrity, genius, and worth,  
Who soon a performance intends to set forth ;  
A work miscellaneous, extensive, and free,  
Which will weekly appear, by the name of the *Bee*.  
Of this from himself I enclose you a plan,  
And hope you will give what assistance you can.  
Entangled with business, and haunted with care,  
In which more or less human nature must share,  
Some moments of leisure the Muses will claim,  
A sacrifice due to amusement and fame.  
The *Bee*, which sucks honey from every gay bloom,  
With some rays of your genius her work may illume ;  
Whilst the flower whence her honey spontaneously flows,  
As fragrantly smells and as vig'rously grows.

Now with kind gratulations 'tis time to conclude,  
And add, your promotion is here understood ;  
Thus free from the servile employ of Excise, sir,  
We hope soon to hear you commence supervisor ;  
You then more at leisure, and free from control,  
May indulge the strong passion that reigns in your soul.

III.

G

But I, feeble I, must to nature give way ;  
 Devoted cold death's and longevity's prey ;  
 From verses though languid my thoughts must unbend,  
 Though still I remain your affectionate friend—

THOMAS BLACKLOCK.

A fragment of a letter of Burns to Dr Anderson, which Cromek recovered, evidently refers to this application :—

TO DR ANDERSON.

SIR—I am much indebted to my worthy friend Dr Blacklock, for introducing me to a gentleman of Dr Anderson's celebrity; but when you do me the honour to ask my assistance in your proposed publication, alas! sir, you might as well think to cheapen a little honesty at the sign of an advocate's wig, or humility under the Geneva band. I am a miserable hurried devil, worn to the marrow in the friction of holding the noses of the poor publicans to the grindstone of the Excise! and, like Milton's Satan, for private reasons, am forced

*To do what yet though damned I would abhor*

—and, except a couplet or two of honest execration \* \* \* R. B.<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen a little of the correspondence between Burns and his youngest brother William, and of the substantial kindness shewn by the former to a youth in a manner thrown upon his care by the death of their father. The young man died in London in September 1790, and the expense of his last illness and funeral appears to have been promptly discharged by the poet, as the receipt for it is dated October 8th.

It chances that some documents, evidencing the promptitude and exactness of Burns as a servant of the government, have been preserved and recently brought to light. The first is a petition of T. J., farmer at Mirecleugh, addressed to the justices of peace for Dumfriesshire, reclaiming against a fine of £5 which Collector Mitchell had imposed on him for 'making fifty-four bushels of malt, without entry, notice, or licence.' J. stated that he had been in the habit of making malt for forty years without making entry of his kiln or pond, which he

<sup>1</sup> This little piece of business is here for the first time put into proper order. By Dr Currie the versified epistle of Blacklock was published nakedly, with the date 1789. As it is, nevertheless, in the place it should have occupied if dated 1790, and as December 1790 is the date of the commencement of the *Bee*, I have no doubt that '1789' is one of the many chronological errors and misprints of Currie. The fragment of Burns's letter is printed by Cromek under 1794, and by Allan Cunningham is supposed to be addressed to Dr Robert Anderson, the early patron of Thomas Campbell, and editor of the *British Poets*. These editors had alike failed to observe the palpable relation of the one letter to the other.

deemed unnecessary, because the malting was always effected at one operation, and not till notice had been given to the proper officer. With respect to 'notice' on this occasion — having inquired of Mr Burns which was the best way of sending it to him, he had been informed that a letter might be sent to 'John Kelloch's' in Thornhill, whence it might be forwarded by post. He had brought Mrs Kelloch to swear that such a letter had been sent to her by J.'s son for Mr Burns, but had been mislaid. He offered to swear that he had sent the notice to Thornhill in good time, and had had no intention to defraud the revenue. With respect to 'licence,' J. averred that he had only been prevented from renewing it as usual this year because Mr Mitchell, on his applying for it, had put him off to another time, on the score of being too busy at the time to grant it to him.

In respect of J.'s petition, the justices, Mr Fergusson of Craigdarroch, and Captain Riddel, ordered the collector to stop proceedings until they should have had an opportunity of inquiring into the truth of what it set forth. Then came Burns's

#### 'ANSWERS TO THE PETITION OF T. J.

'1. Whether the petitioner has been in use formerly to malt all his grain at one operation, is foreign to the purpose: this last season he certainly malted his crop at four or five operations; but be that as it may, Mr J. ought to have known that by express act of parliament no malt, however small the quantity, can be legally manufactured until previous entry be made in writing of all the ponds, barns, floors, &c. so as to be used before the grain can be put to steep. In the Excise entry-books for the division there is not a syllable of T. J.'s name for a number of years bygone.

'2. True it is that Mr Burns, on his first ride, in answer to Mr J.'s question anent the conveying of the notices, among other ways pointed out the sending it by post as the most eligible method, but at the same time added this express clause, and to which Mr Burns is willing to make faith: "At the same time, remember, Mr J., that the notice is at your risk until it reach me!" Farther, when Mr Burns came to the petitioner's kiln, there was a servant belonging to Mr J. ploughing at a very considerable distance from the kiln, who left his plough and three horses without a driver, and came into the kiln, which Mr B. thought was rather a suspicious circumstance, as there was nothing extraordinary in an Excise-officer going into a legal malt-floor so as to [induce a man to] leave three horses yoked to a plough in

the distant middle of a moor. This servant, on being repeatedly questioned by Mr Burns, could not tell when the malt was put to steep, when it was taken out, &c.—in short, was determined to be entirely ignorant of the affair. By and by, Mr J.'s son came in, and on being questioned as to the steeping, taking out of the grain, &c. Mr J., junior, referred me to this said servant, this ploughman, who, he said, must remember it best, as having been the principal actor in the business. The lad then, having gotten his cue, circumstantially recollected all about it.

'All this time, though I was telling the son and servant the nature of the premunire they had incurred, though they pleaded for mercy keenly, the affair of the notice having been sent never once occurred to them, not even the son, who is said to have been the bearer. This was a stroke reserved for, and worthy of the gentleman himself. As to Mrs Kellock's oath, it proves nothing. She did indeed depone to a line being left for me at her house, which said line miscarried. It was a sealed letter; she could not tell whether it was a malt-notice or not; she could not even condescend on the month, nor so much as the season of the year. The truth is, T. J. and his family being Seceders, and consequently coming every Sunday to Thornhill Meeting-house, they were a good conveyance for the several maltsters and traders in their neighbourhood to transmit to post their notices, permits, &c.

'But why all this tergiversation? It was put to the petitioner in open court, after a full investigation of the cause: "Was he willing to swear that he meant no fraud in the matter?" And the justices told him that if he swore he would be assoilzied [absolved], otherwise he should be fined; still the petitioner, after ten minutes' consideration, found his conscience unequal to the task, and declined the oath.

'Now, indeed, he says he is willing to swear: he has been exercising his conscience in private, and will perhaps stretch a point. But the fact to which he is to swear was equally and in all parts known to him on that day when he refused to swear as to-day: nothing can give him further light as to the intention of his mind, respecting his meaning or not meaning a fraud in the affair. *No time can cast further light on the present resolves of the mind; but time will reconcile, and has reconciled many a man to that iniquity which he at first abhorred.*'

This is followed by a note of Collector Mitchell, calling for confirmation of judgment against J.<sup>1</sup> A brief, dateless letter

<sup>1</sup> The documents respecting the Mirecleugh prosecution, exclusive of the letter which follows, were found among the official papers of Mr Kerr, who was clerk of the peace at the time: they are now in the possession of Mr M'Gowan, architect, Dumfries. The answers by Burns are in his well-known hand, without signature.

of Burns to this gentleman evidently refers to the affair, and shews that the poet was far from being assured that the justices would decide in favour of the revenue.

## TO COLLECTOR MITCHELL.

ELLISLAND [October 13, 1790.]

SIR—I shall not fail to wait on Captain Riddel to-night—I wish and pray that the goddess of justice herself would appear to-morrow among our hon. gentlemen, merely to give them a word in their ear that mercy to the thief is injustice to the honest man. For my part, I have galloped over my ten parishes these four days, until this moment that I am just alighted, or rather that my poor jackass-skeleton of a horse has let me down; for the miserable devil has been on his knees half a score of times within the last twenty miles, telling me in his own way: ‘Behold, am not I thy faithful jade of a horse, on which thou hast ridden these many years!’

In short, sir, I have broke my horse’s wind, and almost broke my own neck, besides some injuries in a part that shall be nameless, owing to a hard-hearted stone of a saddle. I find that every offender has so many great men to espouse his cause, that I shall not be surprised if I am not<sup>1</sup> committed to the stronghold of the law to-morrow for insolence to the dear friends of the gentlemen of the country. I have the honour to be, sir, your obliged and obedient humble

R. B.

How the matter ended does not appear.

TO CRAUFORD TAIT, ESQ., EDINBURGH.<sup>2</sup>

ELLISLAND, 15th October 1790.

DEAR SIR—Allow me to introduce to your acquaintance the bearer, Mr Wm. Duncan, a friend of mine, whom I have long known and long loved. His father, whose only son he is, has a decent little property in Ayrshire, and has bred the young man to the law, in which department he comes up an adventurer to your good town. I shall give you my friend’s character in two words: as to his head, he has talents enough, and more than enough, for common life; as to his heart, when nature had kneaded the kindly clay that composes it, she said: ‘I can no more.’

You, my good sir, were born under kinder stars; but your fraternal sympathy, I well know, can enter into the feelings of the young man

<sup>1</sup> There evidently should be but one negative in this sentence.

<sup>2</sup> Son of Mr Tait, of Harvieston, where Burns had been so pleasantly entertained on several occasions in 1787.

who goes into life with the laudable ambition to *do something*, and to *be something* among his fellow-creatures, but whom the consciousness of friendless obscurity presses to the earth, and wounds to the soul!

Even the fairest of his virtues are against him. That independent spirit, and that ingenuous modesty—qualities inseparable from a noble mind—are, with the million, circumstances not a little disqualifying. What pleasure is in the power of the fortunate and the happy, by their notice and patronage, to brighten the countenance and glad the heart of such depressed youth! I am not so angry with mankind for their deaf economy of the purse: the goods of this world cannot be divided without being lessened—but why be a niggard of that which bestows bliss on a fellow-creature, yet takes nothing from our own means of enjoyment! We wrap ourselves up in the cloak of our own better fortune, and turn away our eyes, lest the wants and woes of our brother-mortals should disturb the selfish apathy of our souls!

I am the worst hand in the world at asking a favour. That indirect address, that insinuating implication, which, without any positive request, plainly expresses your wish, is a talent not to be acquired at a plough-tail. Tell me, then—for you can—in what periphrasis of language, in what circumvolution of phrase, I shall envelop, yet not conceal, this plain story!—‘My dear Mr Tait, my friend Mr Duncan, whom I have the pleasure of introducing to you, is a young lad of your own profession, and a gentleman of much modesty and great worth. Perhaps it may be in your power to assist him in the, to him, important consideration of getting a place; but at all events, your notice and acquaintance will be a very great acquisition to him, and I dare pledge myself that he will never disgrace your favour.’

You may possibly be surprised, sir, at such a letter from me; ’tis, I own, in the usual way of calculating these matters, more than our acquaintance entitles me to; but my answer is short: Of all the men at your time of life whom I knew in Edinburgh, you are the most accessible on the side on which I have assailed you. You are very much altered, indeed, from what you were when I knew you, if generosity point the path you will not tread, or humanity call to you in vain.

As to myself—a being to whose interest I believe you are still a well-wisher—I am here, breathing at all times, thinking sometimes, and rhyming now and then. Every situation has its share of the cares and pains of life, and my situation, I am persuaded, has a full ordinary allowance of its pleasures and enjoyments.

My best compliments to your father and Miss Tait. If you have an opportunity, please remember me in the solemn-league-and-covenant of friendship to Mrs Lewis Hay.<sup>1</sup> I am a wretch for not writing her; but I am so hackneyed with self-accusation in that way

<sup>1</sup> Formerly Miss Margaret Chalmers.

that my conscience lies in my bosom with scarce the sensibility of an oyster in its shell. Where is Lady M'Kenzie? Wherever she is, God bless her! I likewise beg leave to trouble you with compliments to Mr Wm. Hamilton, Mrs Hamilton and family, and Mrs Chalmers, when you are in that country. Should you meet with Miss Nimme, please remember me kindly to her.

R. B.

On the day when Burns wrote this letter, he received a visit from his young friend Robert Ainslie. It was the *kirn* night, or evening for the celebration of harvest-home, and Ainslie found, besides a sister of Burns and a sister of Mrs Burns, who were ordinary inmates of the house, three male and female cousins who had been assisting in the harvest-work, and a few neighbours of homely character. 'We spent the evening,' says Ainslie in a letter to Mrs M'Lehose, 'in the way common on such occasions, of dancing, and kissing the lasses at the end of every dance.' The guest speaks of Burns's hearty welcome to himself, and of his kind attentions to Mrs Burns, but does not seem to have thought the *ménage* and company worthy of the poet. 'Our friend,' he says, 'is as ingenious as ever, and seems happy with the situation I have described. His mind, however, seems to me to be a great mixture of the poet and exciseman. One day he sits down and writes a beautiful poem—and the next seizes a cargo of tobacco from some unfortunate smuggler, or rousps out some poor wretch for selling liquors without a licence. From his conversation, he seems to be pretty frequently among the great. . . . Having found that his farm does not answer, he is about to give it up, and depend wholly on the Excise.'<sup>1</sup>

As if to make up by one great effort for the scant attention he had this year given to the Muse, Burns composed in its fall the much-admired poem of *Tam o' Shanter*. According to the recital of Gilbert Burns, it originated thus:—'When my father feued his little property near Alloway Kirk, the wall of the churchyard had gone to ruin, and cattle had free liberty of pasture in it. My father and two or three neighbours joined in an application to the town-council of Ayr, who were superiors of the adjoining land, for liberty to rebuild it, and raised by subscription a sum for enclosing this ancient cemetery with a wall: hence he came to consider it as his burial-place, and we learned that reverence for it people generally have for the burial-place of their ancestors. My brother was living in Ellisland, when Captain Grose, on his peregrinations through Scotland, stayed some time at Carse House in the neighbourhood, with Captain Robert Riddel of Glenriddel,

<sup>1</sup> Original letter in the possession of the late Mr W. C. M'Lehose, grandson of Clarinda.



a particular friend of my brother's. The antiquary and the poet were "unco pack and thiek thegither." Robert requested of Captain Grose, when he should come to Ayrshire, that he would make a drawing of Alloway Kirk, as it was the burial-place of his father, where he himself had a sort of claim to lay down his bones when they should be no longer serviceable to him; and added, by way of encouragement, that it was the scene of many a good story of witches and apparitions, of which he knew the captain was very fond. The captain agreed to the request, provided the poet would furnish a witch-story, to be printed along with it. *Tam o' Shanter* was produced on this occasion, and was first published in *Grose's Antiquities of Scotland*.

'The poem,' says Mr Lockhart, 'was the work of one day; and Mrs Burns well remembers the circumstances. He spent most of the day on his favourite walk by the river, where, in the afternoon, she joined him with some of her children—[there were then only two.] He was busily *crooning to himself*, and Mrs Burns, perceiving that her presence was an interruption, loitered behind with her little ones among the broom. Her attention was presently attracted by the strange and wild gesticulations of the bard, who, now at some distance, was *agonised* with an ungovernable access of joy. He was reciting very loud, and with the tears rolling down his cheeks, those animated verses which he had just conceived—

"Now Tam, O Tam! had thae been queans,  
A' plump and strappin' in their teens;  
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannin,  
Been snaw-white seventeen-hunder linen!  
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,  
That ance were plush, o' guid blue hair,  
I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies,  
For ae blink o' the bonny burdies!"<sup>1</sup>

#### TAM O' SHANTER:

##### A TALE.

'Of brownyis and of bogilis full is this buke.'

GAWIN DOUGLAS.

When chapman billies leave the street,	fellows
And drouthy neibors, neibors meet,	
As market-days are wearing late,	
And folk begin to tak the gate;	road

<sup>1</sup> 'The above,' says Mr Lockhart, 'is quoted from a manuscript journal of Cromek. Mr M'Diarmid confirms the statement, and adds that the poet, having committed the verses to writing on the top of his sod-dike over the water, came into the house, and read them immediately in high triumph at the fireside.'

While we sit bousing at the nappy,  
 And gettin' fou and unco happy,  
 We think na on the lang Scots miles,  
 The mosses, waters, slaps, and stiles,  
 That lie between us and our hame,  
 Where sits our sulky sullen dame,  
 Gathering her brows like gathering storm,  
 Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,  
 As he frae Ayr ae night did canter,  
 (Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses  
 For honest men and bonnie lasses.)

O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise,  
 As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!  
 She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,  
 A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;<sup>1</sup>  
 That frae November till October,  
 Ae market-day thou was na sober;  
 That ilka melder,<sup>2</sup> wi' the miller,  
 Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;  
 That every naig was ca'd a shoe on,  
 The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;  
 That at the Lord's house, even on Sunday,  
 Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean till Monday.<sup>3</sup>  
 She prophesied, that, late or soon,  
 Thou would be found deep drowned in Doon,  
 Or catched wi' warlocks in the mirk,  
 By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

darkness

Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,  
 To think how mony counsels sweet,  
 How mony lengthened sage advices,  
 The husband frae the wife despises!

causes cry

But to our tale :—Ae market-night,  
 Tam had got planted unco right,  
 Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,  
 Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;  
 And at his elbow, Souter Johnny,  
 His ancient, trusty, dronthy crony;  
 Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither—  
 They had been fou' for weeks thegither!

new ale

<sup>1</sup> An idle-talking fellow.

<sup>2</sup> 'The quantity of meal ground at the mill at one time.'—*Dr Jamieson*.

<sup>3</sup> In Scotland, the village where a parish church is situated is usually called the Kirkton. A certain Jean Kennedy, who kept a reputable public-house in the village of Kirkoswald, is here alluded to.

The night drave on wi' saags and clatter,  
 And aye the ale was growing better:  
 The landlady and Tam grew gracious,  
 Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious;  
 The Souter tauld his queerest stories,  
 The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:  
 The storm without might rair and rustle—  
 Tam didna mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,  
 E'en drowned himself amang the nappy!  
 As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,  
 The minutes winged their way wi' pleasure:  
 Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,  
 O'er a' the ills o' life victorious.

But pleasures are like poppies spread,  
 You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;  
 Or like the snowfall in the river,  
 A moment white—then melts for ever;<sup>1</sup>  
 Or like the borealis race,  
 That flit ere you can point their place;  
 Or like the rainbow's lovely form  
 Evanishing amid the storm.  
 Nae man can tether time or tide,  
 The hour approaches Tam maun ride;  
 That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane,  
 That dreary hour he mounts his beast in;  
 And sic a night he takes the road in  
 As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;  
 The rattling showers rose on the blast;  
 The speedy gleams the darkness swallowed,  
 Loud, deep, and lang the thunder bellowed:  
 That night, a child might understand,  
 The Deil had business on his hand.

Weel mounted on his gray mare, Meg,  
 A better never lifted leg,  
 Tam skelpit on through dub and mire,  
 Despising wind, and rain, and fire;  
 Whiles holding fast his guid blue bonnet,  
 Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet;  
 Whiles glowering round wi' prudent cares,  
 Lest bogles catch him unawares.

humming  
 staring

<sup>1</sup> *Canidior nivibus, tunc cum cecidere recentes,  
 In liquidas nondum quas mora vertit aquas.*

*Ovid. Amor. lib. 5.*

Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,<sup>1</sup>  
Where ghaists and houlets nightly cry.

By this time he was cross the ford,  
Where in the snaw the chapman smooored;      smothered

<sup>1</sup> Alloway Kirk, with its little enclosed burial-ground, stands beside the road from Ayr to Maybole, about two miles from the former town. The church has long been roofless, but the walls are pretty well preserved, and it still retains its bell at the east end. Upon the whole, the spectator is struck with the idea that the witches must have had a rather narrow stage for the performance of their revels, as described in the poem. The inner area is now divided by a partition-wall, and one part forms the family burial-place of Mr Cathcart of Blairston. The "wincock-bunker in the east," where sat the awful musician of the party, is a conspicuous feature, being a small window divided by a thick mullion. Around the building are the vestiges of other openings, at any of which the hero of the tale may be supposed to have looked in upon the hellish scene. Within the last few years the old oaken fasters of the kirk were mostly entire, but they have now been entirely taken away, to form, in various shapes, memorials of a place so remarkably signalled by genius. It is necessary for those who survey the ground in reference to the poem, to be informed that the old road from Ayr to this spot, by which Burns supposed his hero to have approached Alloway Kirk, was considerably to the west of the present one, which, nevertheless, has existed since before the time of Burns. Upon a field about a quarter of a mile to the north-west of the kirk, is a single tree enclosed with a paling, the last remnant of a group which covered

———— "the cairn  
Where hunters fand the murdered bairn; "

and immediately beyond that object is

———— "the ford,  
Where in the snaw the chapman smooored; "

(namely, a ford over a small burn which soon after joins the Doon) being two places which Tam o' Shanter is described as having passed on his solitary way. The road then made a sweep towards the river, and, passing a well which trickles down into the Doon, where formerly stood a thorn, on which an individual, called in the poem "Mungo's mither," committed suicide, approached Alloway Kirk upon the west. These circumstances may here appear trivial, but it is surprising with what interest any visitor to the real scene will inquire into, and behold every part of it which can be associated, however remotely, with the poem of *Tam o' Shanter*. The churchyard contains several old monuments, of a very humble description, marking the resting-places of undistinguished persons, who formerly lived in the neighbourhood, and probably had the usual hereditary title to little spaces of ground in this ancient cemetery. Among those persons rests William Burness, father of the poet, over whose grave the son had piously raised a small stone, recording his name and the date of his death, together with the short poetical tribute to his memory which is copied in the works of the bard. But for this monument, long ago destroyed and carried away piecemeal, there is now substituted one of somewhat finer proportions. But the churchyard of Alloway has now become fashionable with the dead as well as the living. Its little area is absolutely crowded with modern monuments, referring to persons many of whom have been brought from considerable distances to take their rest in this doubly-consecrated ground. Among these is one to the memory of a person named Tyrie, who, visiting the spot some years ago, happened to express a wish that he might be laid in Alloway Churchyard, and, as fate would have it, was interred in the spot he had pointed out within a fortnight. Nor is this all; for even the neighbouring gentry are now contending for departments in this fold of the departed, and it is probable that the elegant mausolea of rank and wealth will soon be jostling with the stunted obelisks of humble worth and noteless poverty.—*Chambers's Journal*, 1833.

'Oct. 22, 1823, [died] at Doonfoot Mill, Mr David Watt, miller, in the sixty-eighth year of his age. He was school-fellow with the celebrated Robert Burns, and the last person baptised in Alloway Kirk.'—*Magazine Obituary*.

And past the birks and meikle stane,  
 Where drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane;  
 And through the whins, and by the cairn,  
 Where hunters fand the murdered bairn;  
 And near the thorn, aboon the well,  
 Where Mungo's mither hanged hersel.  
 Before him Doon pours all his floods;  
 The doubling storm roars through the woods;  
 The lightnings flash from pole to pole,  
 Near and more near the thunders roll;  
 When, glimmering through the groaning trees,  
 Kirk-Alloway seemed in a bleeze;  
 Through ilka bore the beams were glancing,  
 And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

gorse

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!  
 What dangers thou canst make us scorn!  
 Wi' tippenny we fear nae evil;  
 Wi' usquebae we'll face the devil!—  
 The swats sae reamed in Tammie's noddle,  
 Fair play, he cared na deils a boddle.  
 But Maggie stood right sair astonished,  
 Till, by the heel and hand admonished,  
 She ventured forward on the light;  
 And, wow! Tam saw an unco sight!  
 Warlocks and witches in a dance;  
 Nae cotillon brent new frae France,  
 But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,  
 Put life and mettle in their heels:  
 A winnock-bunker in the east,  
 There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;  
 A towzie tyke, black, grim, and large,  
 To gie them music was his charge;  
 He screwed the pipes and gart them skirl,  
 Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.  
 Coffins stood round, like open presses,  
 That shawed the dead in their last dresses;  
 And by some devilish cantrip slight  
 Each in its cauld hand held a light—  
 By which heroic Tam was able  
 To note upon the haly table,  
 A murderer's banes in gibbet airns;  
 Twa span-lang, wee unchristened bairns;  
 A thief, new-cutted frae a rape,  
 Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;  
 Five tomahawks, wi' bluid red-rusted;  
 Five scimitars, wi' murder crusted;  
 A garter which a babe had strangled;  
 A knife, a father's throat had mangled,

shaggy dog

scream

vibrate

trick

Whom his ain son o' life bereft,  
 The gray hairs yet stak to the haft :  
 Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',  
 Which even to name wad be unlawfu'.

As Tammie glewred, amazed and curious,  
 The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:  
 The piper loud and louder blew;  
 The dancers quick and quicker flew;  
 They reeled, they set, they crossed, they cleekit, linked  
 Till ilka carline swat and reekit, smoked  
 And coost her duddies to the wark, clothes  
 And linket at it in her sark !

Now Tam, O Tam ! had thae been queans,  
 A' plump and strappin' in their teens ;  
 Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen, greasy  
 Been snaw-white seventeen-hunder linen !<sup>1</sup>  
 Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,  
 That ance were plush, o' guid blue hair,  
 I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies,  
 For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies !  
 But withered beldams, auld and droll,  
 Rigwoodie<sup>2</sup> hags, wad spean a foal, wean  
 Louping and flinging on a cummock, stick  
 I wonder didna turn thy stomach.

But Tam kenned what was what fu' brawlie ;  
 There was ae winsome wench and walie, goodly  
 That night enlisted in the core,  
 (Lang after kenned on Carrick shore ;  
 For mony a beast to dead she shot,  
 And perished mony a bonnie boat,  
 And shook baith meikle corn and bear,  
 And kept the country-side in fear.)  
 Her cutty-sark, o' Paisley harn, short shift  
 That while a lassie she had worn,  
 In longitude though sorely scanty,  
 It was her best, and she was vauntie—  
 Ah ! little kenned thy reverend grannie,  
 That sark she coft for her wee Nannie,  
 Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches),  
 Wad ever graced a dance o' witches !

But here my Muse her wing maun cour,  
 Sic flights are far beyond her power ;

<sup>1</sup> 'The manufacturer's term for a fine linen, woven in a reed of 1700 divisions.'—*Cromek*.

<sup>2</sup> Worthy of the gallows.

To sing how Nannie lap and flang,  
 (A souple jad she was and strang,  
 And how Tam stood like ane bewitched,  
 And thought his very een enriched ;  
 Even Satan glowred and fided fu' fain,  
 And hotched and blew wi' might and main :  
 Till first ae caper, syne anither,  
 Tam tint his reason a' thegither,  
 And roars out, ' Weel done, Cutty-sark !'  
 And in an instant all was dark :  
 And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,  
 When out the hellish legion sallied.  
 As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke,  
 When plundering herds assail their byke ;  
 As open pussie's mortal foes,  
 When, pop ! she starts before their nose ;  
 As eager runs the market-crowd,  
 When ' Catch the thief !' resounds aloud ;  
 So Maggie runs, the witches follow,  
 Wi' mony an eldritch screech and hollow.

fret  
 nest  
 the hare

frightful

Ah, Tam ! ah, Tam ! thou'lt get thy fairin' !  
 In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin' !  
 In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin' !  
 Kate soon will be a woefu' woman !  
 Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,  
 And win the keystone<sup>1</sup> o' the brig ;  
 There at them thou thy tail may toss,  
 A running stream they darena cross !  
 But ere the keystone she could make,  
 The fient a tail she had to shake !  
 For Nannie, far before the rest,  
 Hard upon noble Maggie prest,  
 And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle,  
 But little wist she Maggie's mettle—  
 Ae spring brought off her master hale,  
 But left behind her ain gray tail :  
 The carline claut her by the rump,  
 And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

endeavour

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,  
 Ilk man and mother's son take heed :  
 Whene'er to drink you are inclined,  
 Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,  
 Think ! ye may buy the joys ower dear—  
 Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

<sup>1</sup> It is a well-known fact that witches, or any evil spirits, have no power to follow a poor wight any farther than the middle of the next running stream. It may be proper likewise to mention to the benighted traveller, that when he falls in with *dogies*, whatever danger may be in his going forward, there is much more hazard in turning back.—B.

It appears that Burns originally sent his Alloway - Kirk witch-stories in a plain prose recital as follows :—

TO FRANCIS GROSE, ESQ.

AMONG the many witch-stories I have heard relating to Alloway Kirk, I distinctly remember only two or three.

Upon a stormy night, amid whistling squalls of wind and bitter blasts of hail—in short, on such a night as the devil would choose to take the air in—a farmer, or farmer's servant, was plodding and plashing homeward with his plough - irons on his shoulder, having been getting some repairs on them at a neighbouring smithy. His way lay by the kirk of Alloway ; and being rather on the anxious look-out in approaching a place so well known to be a favourite haunt of the devil, and the devil's friends and emissaries, he was struck aghast by discovering through the horrors of the storm and stormy night, a light, which on his nearer approach plainly shewed itself to proceed from the haunted edifice. Whether he had been fortified from above on his devout supplication, as is customary with people when they suspect the immediate presence of Satan, or whether, according to another custom, he had got courageously drunk at the smithy, I will not pretend to determine ; but so it was, that he ventured to go up to, nay, into the very kirk. As luck would have it, his temerity came off unpunished.

The members of the infernal junto were all out on some midnight business or other, and he saw nothing but a kind of kettle or caldron, depending from the roof, over the fire, simmering some heads of unchristened children, limbs of executed malefactors, &c. for the business of the night. It was, in for a penny, in for a pound, with the honest ploughman : so without ceremony he unhooked the caldron from off the fire, and pouring out the damnable ingredients, inverted it on his head, and carried it fairly home, where it remained long in the family, a living evidence of the truth of the story.

Another story, which I can prove to be equally authentic, was as follows :—

On a market-day in the town of Ayr, a farmer from Carrick, and consequently whose way lay by the very gate of Alloway Kirkyard, in order to cross the river Doon at the old bridge, which is about two or three hundred yards farther on than the said gate, had been detained by his business, till by the time he reached Alloway it was the wizard hour, between night and morning.

Though he was terrified with a blaze streaming from the kirk, yet as it is a well-known fact, that to turn back on these occasions is running by far the greatest risk of mischief, he prudently advanced on his road. When he had reached the gate of the kirkyard, he was surprised and entertained, through the ribs and arches of an old Gothic window, which still faces the highway, to see a dance of witches merrily footing it round their old sooty blackguard master, who was keeping them all alive with the power of his bagpipe. The farmer,



stopping his horse to observe them a little, could plainly descry the faces of many old women of his acquaintance and neighbourhood. How the gentleman was dressed, tradition does not say, but that the ladies were all in their smocks : and one of them happening unluckily to have a smock which was considerably too short to answer all the purpose of that piece of dress, our farmer was so tickled, that he involuntarily burst out, with a loud laugh, 'Weel lappen, Maggy wi' the short sark !' and recollecting himself, instantly spurred his horse to the top of his speed. I need not mention the universally-known fact, that no diabolical power can pursue you beyond the middle of a running stream. Lucky it was for the poor farmer that the river Doon was so near, for notwithstanding the speed of his horse, which was a good one, against he reached the middle of the arch of the bridge, and consequently the middle of the stream, the pursuing, vengeful hags were so close at his heels, that one of them actually sprang to seize him : but it was too late ; nothing was on her side of the stream but the horse's tail, which immediately gave way at her infernal grip, as if blasted by a stroke of lightning ; but the farmer was beyond her reach. However, the unsightly, tail-less condition of the vigorous steed was, to the last hour of the noble creature's life, an awful warning to the Carriek farmers not to stay too late in Ayr markets.

The last relation I shall give, though equally true, is not so well identified as the two former with regard to the scene ; but as the best authorities give it for Alloway, I shall relate it.

On a summer's evening, about the time nature puts on her sables to mourn the expiry of the cheerful day, a shepherd-boy, belonging to a farmer in the immediate neighbourhood of Alloway Kirk, had just folded his charge, and was returning home. As he passed the kirk, in the adjoining field, he fell in with a crew of men and women, who were busy pulling stems of the plant ragwort. He observed that as each person pulled a ragwort, he or she got astride of it, and called out, 'Up horsie !' on which the ragwort flew off, like Pegasus, through the air with its rider. The foolish boy likewise pulled his ragwort, and cried with the rest, 'Up horsie !' and, strange to tell, away he flew with the company. The first stage at which the cavalcade stopt was a merchant's wine-cellar in Bordeaux, where, without saying by your leave, they quaffed away at the best the cellar could afford, until the morning, foe to the imps and works of darkness, threatened to throw light on the matter, and frightened them from their carousals.

The poor shepherd lad, being equally a stranger to the scene and the liquor, heedlessly got himself drunk ; and when the rest took horse, he fell asleep, and was found so next day by some of the people belonging to the merchant. Somebody that understood Scotch, asking him what he was, he said such-a-one's herd in Alloway ; and by some means or other getting home again, he lived long to tell the world the wondrous tale.

R. B.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This letter was communicated by Mr Gilchrist, of Stamford, to Sir Egerton Brydges, by whom it was published in the *Censura Literaria*, 1796.

The country people in Ayrshire, contrary to their wont, unmythicise the narrations of Burns, and point both to a real Tam and Souter Johnny and to a natural occurrence as the basis of the fiction. Their story is as follows:—The hero was an honest farmer named Douglas Graham, who lived at Shanter, between Turnberry and Colzean. His wife, Helen M'Taggart, was much addicted to superstitious beliefs. Graham, dealing in malt, went to Ayr every market-day, whither he was frequently accompanied by a shoemaking neighbour, John Davidson, who dealt a little in leather. The two would often linger to a late hour in the taverns at the market-town. One night, when riding home more than usually late by himself in a storm of wind and rain, Graham, in passing over Brown Carrick Hill near the Bridge of Doon, lost his bonnet, which contained the money he had drawn that day at the market. To avoid the scolding of his wife, he imposed upon her credulity with a story of witches seen at Alloway Kirk, but did not the less return to the Carrick Hill to seek for his money, which he had the satisfaction to find with his bonnet in a plantation near the road. It is supposed that Burns, when in his youth living among the Carrick farmers at Kirkoswald, became acquainted with Graham and Davidson, studied their grotesque habits, and heard of their various adventures, including that of Alloway Kirk, though perhaps without learning that it was the imposture of a husband upon a too-credulous wife. Douglas Graham and John Davidson, the supposed originals of Tam o' Shanter and Souter Johnny, have long reposed in the churchyard of Kirkoswald, where the former has a handsome monument, bearing a pious inscription.

The poem duly appeared in Grose's work, in connection with a plate of Kirk-Alloway, and with a note of the editor, some of the terms of which will scarcely fail to amuse the modern reader:—

'To my *ingenious* friend, Mr Robert Burns, I have been seriously obligated: he was not only at the pains of making out what was most worthy of notice in Ayrshire, the county honoured by his birth, but he also wrote, expressly for this work, the *pretty tale* annexed to Alloway Church.'

Poor Grose's work appeared at the end of April 1791, and he himself died suddenly at Dublin about three weeks after.

Mrs Dunlop had this summer undergone a severe domestic affliction. Her daughter Susan had married a French gentleman named Henri, of good birth and fortune, and the young couple lived happily at Loudoun Castle in Ayrshire, when (June 22, 1790) the gentleman sank under the effects of a severe cold, leaving his wife pregnant. The birth of a son and heir in the subsequent November is the theme of an exulting letter of Burns.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, [*latter part of*] November 1790.

'As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.'

Fate has long owed me a letter of good news from you, in return for the many tidings of sorrow which I have received. In this instance I most cordially obey the apostle : 'Rejoice with them that do rejoice'—for me to *sing* for joy is no new thing; but to *preach* for joy, as I have done in the commencement of this epistle, is a pitch of extravagant rapture to which I never rose before.

I read your letter—I literally jumped for joy. How could such a mercurial creature as a poet lumpishly keep his seat on the receipt of the best news from his best friend! I seized my gilt-headed Wangee rod, an instrument indispensably necessary, in my left hand, in the moment of inspiration and rapture; and stride, stride—quick and quicker—out skipt I among the broomy banks of Nith to muse over my joy by retail. To keep within the bounds of prose was impossible. Mrs Little's<sup>1</sup> is a more elegant, but not a more sincere compliment to the sweet little fellow, than I, extempore almost, poured out to him in the following verses:—

STANZAS ON THE BIRTH OF A POSTHUMOUS CHILD, BORN UNDER  
PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES OF FAMILY DISTRESS.

Sweet floweret, pledge o' meikle love,  
And ward o' mony a prayer,  
What heart o' stane wad thou na move,  
Sae helpless, sweet, and fair!

November hirkles o'er the lea limps  
Chill on thy lovely form;  
And gane, alas! the sheltering tree  
Should shield thee frae the storm.

May He who gives the rain to pour,  
And wings the blast to blow,  
Protect thee frae the driving shower,  
The bitter frost and snaw!

May He, the friend of wo and want, pangs  
Who heals life's various stounds,  
Protect and guard the mother-plant,  
And heal her cruel wounds!

<sup>1</sup> Mrs Little was a poetical milkmaid in the service of Mrs Henri at Loudoun Castle. For an account of her see *Contemporaries of Burns*. Edinburgh: 1840

But late she flourished, rooted fast,  
Fair on the summer morn;  
Now, feebly bends she in the blast,  
Unsheltered and forlorn.

Blest be thy bloom, thou lovely gem,  
Unscathed by ruffian hand!  
And from thee many a parent stem  
Arise to deck our land!

I am much flattered by your approbation of my *Tam o' Shanter*, which you express in your former letter, though, by the by, you load me in that said letter with accusations heavy and many, to all which I plead, *not guilty!* Your book is, I hear, on the road to reach me. As to printing of poetry, when you prepare it for the press, you have only to spell it right, and place the capital letters properly—as to the punctuation, the printers do that themselves.

I have a copy of *Tam o' Shanter* ready to send you by the first opportunity—it is too heavy to send by post.

I heard of Mr Corbet<sup>1</sup> lately. He, in consequence of your recommendation, is most zealous to serve me. Please favour me soon with an account of your good folks; if Mrs H. is recovering, and the young gentleman doing well.

R. B.

The subsequent history of Mrs Henri and her son is in some points worthy of being commemorated. In a subsequent letter Burns deplores her dangerous and distressing situation in France, exposed to the tumults of the Revolution; and he has soon after occasion to condole with his venerable friend on the death of her daughter in a foreign land. When this sad event took place the orphan child fell under the immediate care of his paternal grandfather, who, however, was soon obliged to take refuge in Switzerland, leaving the infant behind him. Years passed—he and the Scotch friends of the child heard nothing of it, and concluded that it was lost. At length, when the elder Henri was enabled to return to his ancestral domains, he had the unspeakable satisfaction of finding that his grandson and heir was alive and well, having never been removed from the place. The child had been protected and reared with the greatest care by a worthy female named Mademoiselle Susette, formerly a domestic of the family. This excellent person had even contrived, through all the levelling violences of the intervening period, to preserve in her young charge the feelings appropriate to his rank. Though absolutely indebted to her industry for his bread, she had caused him always to be seated by himself at table and regularly waited on, so that

<sup>1</sup> One of the general supervisors of Excise.

the otherwise plebeian circumstances in which he lived did not greatly affect him. The subject of Burns's stanzas was a very few years ago proprietor of the family estates; and it is agreeable to add, that Mademoiselle Susette then lived in his paternal mansion, in the enjoyment of that grateful respect to which her fidelity and discretion so eminently entitled her.

TO WILLIAM DUNBAR, W.S.

ELLISLAND, 17th January 1791.

I AM not gone to Elysium, most noble colonel,<sup>1</sup> but am still here in this sublunary world, serving my God by propagating his image, and honouring my king by begetting him loyal subjects.

Many happy returns of the season await my friend. May the thorns of care never beset his path! May peace be an inmate of his bosom, and rapture a frequent visitor of his soul! May the bloodhounds of misfortune never track his steps, nor the screech-owl of sorrow alarm his dwelling! May enjoyment tell thy hours, and pleasure number thy days, thou friend of the bard! 'Blessed be he that blesseth thee, and cursed be he that curseth thee!!!'

As a further proof that I am still in the land of existence, I send you a poem, the latest I have composed. I have a particular reason for wishing you only to shew it to select friends, should you think it worthy a friend's perusal; but if, at your first leisure hour, you will favour me with your opinion of, and strictures on, the performance, it will be an additional obligation on, dear sir, your deeply-indebted humble servant,

R. B.

TO MR PETER HILL.

ELLISLAND, 17th January 1791.

TAKE these two<sup>2</sup> guineas, and place them overagainst that damned account of yours, which has gagged my mouth these five or six months! I can as little write good things as apologies to the man I owe money to. O the supreme curse of making three guineas do the business of five! Not all the labours of Hercules; not all the Hebrews' three centuries of Egyptian bondage, were such an insuperable business, such an infernal task!! Poverty! thou half-sister of death, thou cousin-german of hell!—where shall I find force of execration equal to the amplitude of thy demerits? Oppressed by thee, the venerable ancient, grown hoary in the practice of every virtue, laden with years and wretchedness, implores a little, little aid to support his existence,

<sup>1</sup> So styled as president of the convivial society called the Crochallan Fencibles.

<sup>2</sup> In the original account, *pence* Mr Thomas Thorburn, Dumfries, Hill enters £3, 3s. to Burns's credit under January 20, 1791, leaving a balance to debit of £3, 7s. 5d. It is probable that two guineas has been written or printed by mistake for three.

from a stony-hearted son of Mammon, whose sun of prosperity never knew a cloud, and is by him denied and insulted. Oppressed by thee, the man of sentiment, whose heart glows with independence, and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhes, in bitterness of soul, under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth. Oppressed by thee, the son of genius, whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see, in suffering silence, his remark neglected, and his person despised, while shallow greatness, in his idiot attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause. Nor is it only the family of worth that have reason to complain of thee—the children of folly and vice, though in common with thee the offspring of evil, smart equally under thy rod. Owing to thee, the man of unfortunate disposition and neglected education is condemned as a fool for his dissipation, despised and shunned as a needy wretch, when his follies as usual bring him to want; and when his unprincipled necessities drive him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his country. But far otherwise is the lot of the man of family and fortune.—*His* early follies and extravagance are spirit and fire; *his* consequent wants are the embarrassments of an honest fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he has gained a legal commission to plunder distant provinces, or massacre peaceful nations, he returns, perhaps, laden with the spoils of rapine and murder; lives wicked and respected, and dies a scoundrel and a lord. Nay, worst of all, alas for helpless woman!—the needy prostitute, who has shivered at the corner of the street, waiting to earn the wages of casual prostitution, is left neglected and insulted, ridden down by the chariot-wheels of the coroneted RIF, hurrying on to the guilty assignation—she who, without the same necessities to plead, riots nightly in the same guilty trade.

Well, divines may say of it what they please, but execration is to the mind what phlebotomy is to the body—the vital sluices of both are wonderfully relieved by their respective evacuations.

R. B.

As poverty, or at least narrowness of circumstances, has been painfully associated with the name of Burns, it is of importance to note at what time, after his sudden transient access of fortune, his purse again became light. He certainly was at ease in this respect down to the early part of 1790, when he proffered assistance to his youngest brother William, in the event of its being wanted. Even in the fall of that year, when the death of William in London caused an unexpected call to be made upon the poet for the discharge of the expenses incurred by the sickness and funeral of the young man, it appears that payment was promptly made.<sup>1</sup> We learn from the above letter that Burns had for some

<sup>1</sup> This appears from a letter found among Burns's papers, and now in the possession of Mr Thomas Thorburn, Dumfries. 'To Mr ROBERT BURNS.—Sir—J

months before the close of 1790 begun to feel himself in some embarrassment for money. What is more, the debt which had gagged him with respect to his friend Hill appears to have been comparatively a trifle—only £6, 10s. 5d. To send £3, 3s. towards an account for a sum so little larger, certainly illustrates in some degree the ‘supreme curse of making three guineas do the business of five.’ It is, nevertheless, equally true and curious that we have to see Burns at this crisis in the new and unexpected character of an *accommodator* or creditor. It is a trivial affair, which would not be worth noting in the life of any ordinary man. In that of Burns, considering how exclusively we have hitherto heard of him as a poor man, in the way of being patronised by others, even the smallest matter on the other side has some interest. There was a certain Alexander Crombie, a builder at Dalswinton, who had reared the farm-edifices at Ellisland, and whom Burns had probably found to be a good fellow struggling with the difficulties of inadequate capital. A bill lies before me, drawn by Burns for £20, under date ‘Dumfries, December 15, 1790,’ at three months, and accepted by Crombie. It is indorsed by Burns to Mr David Staig, agent for the Bank of Scotland at Dumfries. An instrument of protest for non-payment of this bill, drawn up on the 18th of March 1791, is also preserved, shewing that Crombie had not been ready to withdraw it at the proper time. This, after the lapse of some time, had been intimated to the poet by a letter from Mr James Gracie, an officer in the bank, and we obtain from another source a note of Burns in answer thereto:—

GLOBE INN, 8 o'clock P.M.

SIR—I have your letter anent Crombie’s bill. Your forbearance has been very great. I did it to accommodate the thoughtless fellow. He asks till Wednesday week. If he fail, I pay it myself. In the meantime, if horning and caption be absolutely necessary, *grip him by the neck, and welcome.* Yours,

ROBERT BURNS.

It is perhaps just barely worthy of being mentioned, that Mr Hill signs a quittance for payment in full to Burns, 5th December 1791, when the poet would probably be somewhat more in cash than for some time before, in consequence of the sale of his farming effects. The sum was £8, 16s. 8d.

The books collected by a man being an index of his taste, it may be curious to see what those were which Burns obtained from

received your favour of the 5th instant this day, containing a bill for the money expended in your deceased brother’s sickness and funeral. Wishing you all health and happiness, I am, sir, your very humble servant, W. BARBER.—Strand, Oct. 8, 1790.

Peter Hill. We find them to have been as follows:—Letters on the Religion Essential to Man; Peregrine Pickle; Count Fathom; Launcelot Greaves; a Family Bible (£2); Johnson's English Dictionary, 8vo edition; Shakspeare; Ossian's Poems; Smellie's Philosophy of Natural History; The World; Garrick's Works; Cibber's Works—all of these prior to March 6, 1790; the remainder on the 20th January 1791—The Adventurer; Arabian Nights' Entertainments; Joseph Andrews; Roderick Random; The Scots Worthies; Marrow of Modern Divinity; Cole on God's Sovereignty; Newton's Letters; Confession of Faith; Boyle's Voyages; Blair's Sermons; Guthrie's Grammar; Buchan's Domestic Medicine; Price on Providence and Prayer; Don Quixote; The Idler. It thus appears that Burns loved Fielding and Smollett, the English essayists and dramatists, and books of liberal divinity. Besides books, the amount includes £1, 11s. 6d. for a copy of Ainslie's Map of Scotland on rollers. Burns would of course love to see 'Caledonia stern and wild,' his 'auld respected mother,' hung up in full view in his best room.

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TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 23d January 1791.

MANY happy returns of the season to you, my dear friend! As many of the good things of this life as is consistent with the usual mixture of good and evil in the cup of being!

I have just finished a poem—*Tam o' Shanter*—which you will receive enclosed. It is my first essay in the way of tales.

I have these several months been hammering at an elegy on the amiable and accomplished Miss Burnet.<sup>1</sup> I have got, and can get, no farther than the following fragment, on which please give me your strictures. In all kinds of poetic composition, I set great store by your opinion; but in sentimental verses, in the poetry of the heart, no Roman Catholic ever set more value on the infallibility of the Holy Father than I do on yours.

I mean the introductory couplets as text verses.

ELEGY ON THE LATE MISS BURNET OF MONBODDO.

Life ne'er exulted in so rich a prize  
As Burnet, lovely from her native skies;  
Nor envious death so triumphed in a blow,  
As that which laid th' accomplished Burnet low.

<sup>1</sup> This beautiful creature, to whom Burns paid so high a compliment in his address to Edinburgh, had been carried off by consumption, 17th June 1790.



Thy form and mind, sweet maid, can I forget !  
 In richest ore the brightest jewel set !  
 In thee, high Heaven above was truest shewn,  
 As by his noblest work the Godhead best is known.

In vain ye flaunt in summer's pride, ye groves ;  
 Thou crystal streamlet with thy flowery shore,  
 Ye woodland choir that chant your idle loves,  
 Ye cease to charm—Eliza is no more !

Ye heathy wastes, immixed with reedy fens ;  
 Ye mossy streams, with sedge and rushes stored ;  
 Ye rugged cliffs, o'erhanging dreary glens,  
 To you I fly, ye with my soul accord.

Princes, whose cumbrous pride was all their worth,  
 Shall venal lays their pompous exit hail !  
 And thou, sweet excellence ! forsake our earth,  
 And not a muse in honest grief bewail !

We saw thee shine in youth and beauty's pride,  
 And virtue's light, that beams beyond the spheres ;  
 But, like the sun eclipsed at morning-tide,  
 Thou left'st us darkling in a world of tears.

The parent's heart that nestled fond in thee,  
 That heart how sunk, a prey to grief and care ;  
 So decked the woodbine sweet yon aged tree ;  
 So from it ravished, leaves it bleak and bare.

Let me hear from you soon. Adieu !

R. B.

The Rev. Archibald Alison, a clergyman of the English Church, but connected with Scotland, and ultimately for many years minister of one of the Episcopal chapels in Edinburgh, had at this time produced his celebrated *Essay on Taste*. Having become acquainted with Burns in Edinburgh, he sent a copy of the book to Ellisland.

TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD ALISON.

ELLISLAND; 142<sup>nd</sup> Feb. 1791.

SIR—You must by this time have set me down as one of the most ungrateful of men. You did me the honour to present me with a book which does honour to science and the intellectual powers of man, and I have not even so much as acknowledged the receipt of it. The fact is, you yourself are to blame for it. Flattered as I was by your telling me that you wished to have my opinion of the work, the old spiritual enemy of mankind, who knows well that vanity is one

of the sins that most easily beset me, put it into my head to ponder over the performance with the look-out of a critic, and to draw up forsooth a deep-learned digest of strictures on a composition, of which, in fact, until I read the book, I did not even know the first principles. I own, sir, that at first glance several of your propositions startled me as paradoxical. That the martial clangour of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime, than the twingle-twangle of a Jew's harp : that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stub of a burdock ; and that from something innate and independent of all associations of ideas—these I had set down as irrefragable, orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith. In short, sir, except Euclid's *Elements of Geometry*, which I made a shift to unravel by my father's fireside in the winter evenings of the first season I held the plough, I never read a book which gave me such a quantum of information, and added so much to my stock of ideas, as your *Essays on the Principles of Taste*. One thing, sir, you must forgive my mentioning as an uncommon merit in the work—I mean the language. To clothe abstract philosophy in elegance of style sounds something like a contradiction in terms ; but you have convinced me that they are quite compatible.

I enclose you some poetic bagatelles of my late composition. The one in print is my first essay in the way of telling a tale. I am, sir, &c. R. B.

This is the letter which Dugald Stewart, in his communication to Dr Currie respecting Burns—printed in the memoir written by that gentleman—says he read with surprise, as evincing that the unlettered Ayrshire Bard had formed 'a distinct conception of the general principles of the doctrine of association.' The doctrine is one peculiar, we believe, to the Scotch school of metaphysicians, and mainly consists in an assertion, that our ideas of beauty in objects of all kinds arise from our associating with them some other ideas of an agreeable kind. For instance, our notion of beauty in the cheek of a pretty maiden arises from our notions of her health, innocence, and so forth : our notion of the beauty of a Highland prospect, such as the Trosachs, from our notions of the romantic kind of life formerly led in it ; as if there were no female beauty independent of both health and innocence, or fine scenery where men had not formerly worn tartans and claymores. The whole of the above letter of Burns is in reality—though perhaps unmeant by him—a satire on this doctrine, which, notwithstanding the eloquence of an Alison, a Stewart, and a Jeffrey, must now be considered as amongst the dreams of philosophy.

III.

H

TO MRS GRAHAM OF FINTRY.

ELLISLAND, [February] 1791.

MADAM—Whether it is that the story of our Mary Queen of Scots has a peculiar effect on the feelings of a poet, or whether I have in the enclosed ballad succeeded beyond my usual poetic success, I know not, but it has pleased me beyond any effort of my Muse for a good while past ; on that account I enclose it particularly to you. It is true the purity of my motives may be suspected. I am already deeply indebted to Mr Graham's goodness ; and what, *in the usual ways of men*, is of infinitely greater importance, Mr G. can do me service of the utmost importance in time to come. I was born a poor dog ; and however I may occasionally pick a better bone than I used to do, I know I must live and die poor : but I will indulge the flattering faith that my poetry will considerably outlive my poverty ; and without any fustian affectation of spirit, I can promise and affirm that it must be no ordinary craving of the latter shall ever make me do anything injurious to the honest fame of the former. Whatever may be my failings—for failings are a part of human nature—may they ever be those of a generous heart and an independent mind ! It is no fault of mine that I was born to dependence, nor is it Mr Graham's chiefest praise that he can command influence : but it is his merit to bestow, not only with the kindness of a brother, but with the politeness of a gentleman, and I trust it shall be mine to receive with thankfulness, and remember with undiminished gratitude.

R. B.

## L A M E N T

OF

MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS ON THE APPROACH OF SPRING.

Now Nature hangs her mantle green  
 On every blooming tree,  
 And spreads her sheets o' daisies white  
 Out o'er the grassy lea :  
 Now Phœbus cheers the crystal streams,  
 And glads the azure skies ;  
 But nought can glad the weary wight  
 That fast in durance lies.

Now lav'rocks wake the merry morn,  
 Aloft on dewy wing ;  
 The merle, in his noontide bower,  
 Makes woodland echoes ring ;  
 The mavis wild wi' mony a note,  
 Sings drowsy day to rest :  
 In love and freedom they rejoice,  
 Wi' care nor thrall oppress.

Now blooms the lily by the bank,  
The primrose down the brae;  
The hawthorn's budding in the glen,  
And milk-white is the slae;  
The meanest hind in fair Scotland  
May rove their sweets amang;  
But I, the queen of a' Scotland,  
Mann lie in prison strang!

I was the queen o' bonnie France,  
Where happy I hae been;  
Fu' lightly rase I in the morn,  
As blithe lay down at e'en:  
And I'm the sovereign of Scotland,  
And mony a traitor there;  
Yet here I lie in foreign bands,  
And never-ending care.

But as for thee, thou false woman!  
My sister and my fae,  
Grim vengeance yet shall whet a sword  
That through thy soul shall gae!  
The weeping blood in woman's breast  
Was never known to thee;  
Nor th' balm that draps on wounds of wo  
Frae woman's pitying e'e.

My son! my son! may kinder stars  
Upon thy fortune shine!  
And may those pleasures gild thy reign,  
That ne'er wad blink on mine!  
God keep thee frae thy mother's faes,  
Or turn their hearts to thee:  
And where thou meet'st thy mother's friend,  
Remember him for me!

O soon, to me, may summer suns  
Nae mair light up the morn!  
Nae mair, to me, the autumn winds  
Wave o'er the yellow corn!  
And in the narrow house o' death  
Let winter round me rave;  
And the next flowers that deck the spring  
Bloom on my peaceful grave!

TO DR MOORE.

ELLISLAND, 28th February 1791.

I do not know, sir, whether you are a subscriber to *Grose's Antiquities of Scotland*. If you are, the enclosed poem will not be altogether new to you. Captain Grose did me the favour to send me a dozen copies of the proof-sheet, of which this is one. Should you have read the piece before, still this will answer the principal end I have in view—it will give me another opportunity of thanking you for all your goodness to the rustic bard, and also of shewing you that the abilities you have been pleased to commend and patronise are still employed in the way you wish.

The *Elegy on Captain Henderson* is a tribute to the memory of a man I loved much. Poets have in this the same advantage as Roman Catholics: they can be of service to their friends after they have passed that bourne where all other kindness ceases to be of avail. Whether, after all, either the one or the other be of any real service to the dead, is, I fear, very problematical, but I am sure they are highly gratifying to the living: and as a very orthodox text, I forget where in Scripture, says, 'whatsoever is not of faith is sin;' so say I, whatsoever is not detrimental to society, and is of positive enjoyment, is of God, the giver of all good things, and ought to be received and enjoyed by his creatures with thankful delight. As almost all my religious tenets originate from my heart, I am wonderfully pleased with the idea that I can still keep up a tender intercourse with the dearly-beloved friend, or still more dearly-beloved mistress, who is gone to the world of spirits.

The ballad on Queen Mary was begun while I was busy with *Percy's Reliques of English Poetry*. By the way, how much is every honest heart, which has a tincture of Caledonian prejudice, obliged to you for your glorious story of Buchanan and Targe! 'Twas an unequivocal proof of your loyal gallantry of soul giving Targe the victory. I should have been mortified to the ground if you had not.<sup>1</sup>

I have just read over once more of many times your *Zeluco*. I marked with my pencil as I went along every passage that pleased me particularly above the rest, and one or two which, with humble deference, I am disposed to think unequal to the merits of the book. I have sometimes thought to transcribe these marked passages, or at least so much of them as to point where they are, and send them to you. Original strokes that strongly depict the human heart, is your and Fielding's province beyond any other novelist I have ever perused. Richardson, indeed, might perhaps be excepted; but unhappily his *dramatis personæ* are beings of another world; and, however they may captivate the inexperienced, romantic

<sup>1</sup> In Dr Moore's novel Buchanan represents the Lowland puritan feeling of Scotland, Targe the cavalier Highland spirit. In a fight arising from a quarrel about the honour of Queen Mary, Targe is victor.

fancy of a boy or a girl, they will ever, in proportion as we have made human nature our study, dissatisfy our riper years.

As to my private concerns—I am going on, a mighty tax-gatherer before the Lord, and have lately had the interest to get myself ranked on the list of Excise as a supervisor. I am not yet employed as such, but in a few years I shall fall into the file of supervisorship by seniority. I have had an immense loss in the death of the Earl of Glencairn, the patron from whom all my fame and fortune took its rise. Independent of my grateful attachment to him, which was indeed so strong that it pervaded my very soul, and was entwined with the thread of my existence; so soon as the prince's friends had got in—and every dog you know has his day—my getting forward in the Excise would have been an easier business than otherwise it will be. Though this was a consummation devoutly to be wished, yet, thank Heaven, I can live and rhyme as I am; and as to my boys, poor little fellows! if I cannot place them on as high an elevation in life as I could wish, I shall, if I am favoured so much by the Disposer of events as to see that period, fix them on as broad and independent a basis as possible. Among the many wise adages which have been treasured up by our Scottish ancestors, this is one of the best: *Better be the head o' the commonalty than the tail o' the gentry.*

But I am got on a subject which, however interesting to me, is of no manner of consequence to you; so I shall give you a short poem on the other page, and close this with assuring you how sincerely I have the honour to be, yours, &c.

R. B.

Dr Moore's answer to this letter contained some cold criticism on *Tam o' Shanter* and *Matthew Henderson*, but on another point spoke what all will feel to have been good sense: 'I cannot help thinking you imprudent in scattering abroad so many copies of your verses. It is most natural to give a few to confidential friends, particularly to those who are connected with the subject, or who are perhaps themselves the subject; but this ought to be done under promise not to give other copies. Of the poem you sent me on Queen Mary I refused every solicitation for copies; but I lately saw it in a newspaper. My motive for cautioning you on this subject is, that I wish to engage you to collect all your fugitive pieces, not already printed, and after they have been reconsidered and polished to the utmost of your power, I would have you publish them by another subscription; in promoting of which I will exert myself with pleasure.'

Burns seems never to have been willing to listen to any such scheme. To write poetry for the *purpose* of making money by it he regarded with abhorrence; to publish a second volume of poems like the first was only, he feared, to expose himself to the mortification of hearing it pronounced inferior. He still, as in the old

Mossgiel days, 'rhymed for fun;' or if he acknowledged other motives, they were none of them mercenary. He was ever ready, for example, to do what he could to oblige or gratify a friend; he would write in obedience to his own whimsical impulses: above all things, he delighted to improve and add to that glorious inheritance of old songs which his country possessed. At this very time—February 8th—the Rev. Mr Baird<sup>1</sup> wrote to ask him to take some trouble in editing the poems of poor Michael Bruce for the benefit of his aged and helpless mother—begging, moreover, for a few poems of Burns's own, to help out the bulk of the volume. Burns's answer is highly characteristic:

TO THE REV. G. BAIRD.

ELLISLAND, [February] 1791.

REVEREND SIR—Why did you, my dear sir, write to me in such a hesitating style on the business of poor Bruce? Don't I know, and have I not felt, the many ills, the peculiar ills, that poetic flesh is heir to? You shall have your choice of all the unpublished poems I have; and had your letter had my direction so as to have reached me sooner—it only came to my hand this moment—I should have directly put you out of suspense on the subject. I only ask that some prefatory advertisement in the book, as well as the subscription-bills, may bear, that the publication is solely for the benefit of Bruce's mother. I would not put it in the power of ignorance to surmise, or malice to insinuate, that I clubbed a share in the work from mercenary motives. Nor need you give me credit for any remarkable generosity in my part of the business. I have such a host of peccadilloes, failings, follies, and backslidings—anybody but myself might perhaps give some of them a worse appellation—that by way of some balance, however trifling, in the account, I am fain to do any good that occurs in my very limited power to a fellow-creature, just for the selfish purpose of clearing a little the vista of retrospection.

R. B.

It nevertheless does not appear that the edition of Bruce subsequently published contained any poems by Burns.

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TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 12th March 1791.

IF the foregoing piece be worth your strictures, let me have them. For my own part, a thing that I have just composed always appears through a double portion of that partial medium in which an author

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Principal of the University of Edinburgh.

will ever view his own works. I believe, in general, novelty has something in it that inebriates the fancy, and not unfrequently dissipates and fumes away like other intoxication, and leaves the poor patient, as usual, with an aching heart. A striking instance of this might be adduced in the revolution of many a hymeneal honeymoon. But lest I sink into stupid prose, and so sacrilegiously intrude on the office of my parish priest, I shall fill up the page in my own way, and give you another song of my late composition, which will appear perhaps in Johnson's work, as well as the former.

You must know a beautiful Jacobite air, 'There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.' When political combustion ceases to be the object of princes and patriots, it then, you know, becomes the lawful prey of historians and poets.

[THERE'LL NEVER BE PEACE TILL JAMIE COMES HAME.]

By yon castle wa', at the close of the day,  
I heard a man sing, though his head it was gray;  
And as he was singing, the tears fast down came—  
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.  
The church is in ruins, the state is in jars:  
Delusions, oppressions, and murderous wars;  
We darena weel say't, though we ken wha's to blame,  
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.

My seven braw sons for Jamie drew sword,  
And now I greet round their green beds in the yerd.  
It brak the sweet heart of my faithfu' auld dame—  
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.  
Now life is a burden that bows me down,  
Since I tint my bairns, and he tint his crown;  
But till my last moments my words are the same—  
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame!

If you like the air, and if the stanzas hit your fancy, you cannot imagine, my dear friend, how much you would oblige me, if by the charms of your delightful voice you would give my honest effusion to 'the memory of joys that are past' to the few friends whom you indulge in that pleasure. But I have scribbled on till I hear the clock has intimated the near approach of

That hour, o' night's black arch the keystone.

So, good-night to you! Sound be your sleep, and delectable your dreams! Apropos, how do you like this thought in a ballad I have just now on the tapis?

I look to the west when I gae to rest,  
That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be;  
Far, far in the west is he I loe best,  
The lad that is dear to my babie and me!

Good-night once more, and God bless you!

R. B.



At the close of January, Burns met a serious loss, both as respecting his fortunes and his feelings, in the death of his amiable patron James, Earl of Glencairn, who, after returning from a futile voyage to Lisbon in search of health, died at Falmouth, in the forty-second year of his age. The deep, earnest feeling of gratitude which Burns bore towards this nobleman is highly creditable to him. He put on mourning for the earl, and designed, if possible, to attend his funeral in Ayrshire. At a later time, he entered a permanent record of his gratitude in the annals of his family, by calling a son James Glencairn. In the meantime he composed a

LAMENT FOR JAMES, EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

The wind blew hollow frae the hills,  
By fits the sun's departing beam  
Looked on the fading yellow woods  
That waved o'er Lugar's winding stream :  
Beneath a craigy steep, a bard,  
Laden with years and meikle pain,  
In loud lament bewailed his lord,  
Whom death had all untimely ta'en.

He leaned him to an ancient aik,  
Whose trunk was mouldering down with years ;  
His locks were bleached white with time,  
His hoary cheek was wet wi' tears ;  
And as he touched his trembling harp,  
And as he tuned his doleful sang,  
The winds, lamenting through their caves,  
To echo bore the notes along :

' Ye scattered birds that faintly sing,  
The reliques of the vernal quire !  
Ye woods that shed on a' the winds  
The honours of the aged year !  
A few short months, and glad and gay,  
Again ye'll charm the ear and e'e ;  
But nocht in all revolving time  
Can gladness bring again to me.

' I am a bending, aged tree,  
That long has stood the wind and rain ;  
But now has come a cruel blast,  
And my last hold of earth is gane :  
Nae leaf o' mine shall greet the spring,  
Nae simmer sun exalt my bloom ;  
But I maun lie before the storm,  
And ithers plant them in my room.

' I've seen sae many changefu' years,  
On earth I am a stranger grown ;  
I wander in the ways of men,  
Alike unknowing and unknown :  
Unheard, unpitied, unrelieved,  
I bear alane my lade o' care,  
For silent, low, on beds of dust,  
Lie & that would my sorrows share.

' And last (the sum of a' my griefs !)  
My noble master lies in clay ;  
The flower amang our barons bold,  
His country's pride ! his country's stay—  
In weary being now I pine,  
For a' the life of life is dead,  
And hope has left my aged ken,  
On forward wing for ever fled.

' Awake thy last sad voice, my harp !  
The voice of wo and wild despair ;  
Awake ! resound thy latest lay—  
Then sleep in silence evermair !  
And thou, my last, best, only friend,  
That fillest an untimely tomb,  
Accept this tribute from the bard  
Thou brought from fortune's mirkest gloom.

' In poverty's low barren vale  
Thick mists, obscure, involved me round ;  
Though oft I turned the wistful eye,  
Nae ray of fame was to be found :  
Thou found'st me, like the morning sun,  
That melts the fogs in limpid air,  
The friendless bard and rustic song  
Became alike thy fostering care.

' O why has worth so short a date !  
While villains ripen gray with time ;  
Must thou, the noble, generous, great,  
Fall in bold manhood's hardy prime !  
Why did I live to see that day ?  
A day to me so full of wo !—  
O had I met the mortal shaft  
Which laid my benefactor low !

' The bridegroom may forget the bride,  
Was made his wedded wife yestreen ;  
The monarch may forget the crown  
That on his head an hour has been ;

The mother may forget the child  
 That smiles sae sweetly on her knee ;  
 But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,  
 And a' that thou hast done for me !'

LINES SENT TO SIR JOHN WHITEFOORD, BART. OF WHITEFOORD, WITH  
 THE FOREGOING POEM.

Thou, who thy honour as thy God rever'st,  
 Who, save thy mind's reproach, nought earthly fear'st,  
 To thee this votive offering I impart,  
 The tearful tribute of a broken heart.  
 The friend thou valued'st, I the patron loved ;  
 His worth, his honour, all the world approved.  
 We'll mourn till we too go as he has gone,  
 And tread the dreary path to that dark world unknown.

On the same melancholy subject Burns wrote the two following letters. The gentleman here addressed was Lord Glencairn's factor or land-agent, and had been instrumental in bringing the bard into notice.

TO MR ALEXANDER DALZELL, FACTOR, FINDLAYSTON.

ELLISLAND, 19th March 1791.

MY DEAR SIR—I have taken the liberty to frank this letter to you, as it encloses an idle poem of mine, which I send you ; and, God knows, you may perhaps pay dear enough for it if you read it through. Not that this is my own opinion ; but the author, by the time he has composed and corrected his work, has quite pored away all his powers of critical discrimination.

I can easily guess, from my own heart, what you have felt on a late most melancholy event. God knows what I have suffered at the loss of my best friend, my first and dearest patron and benefactor ; the man to whom I owe all that I am and have ! I am gone into mourning for him, and with more sincerity of grief than I fear some will, who, by nature's ties, ought to feel on the occasion.

I will be exceedingly obliged to you, indeed, to let me know the news of the noble family, how the poor mother and the two sisters support their loss. I had a packet of poetic bagatelles ready to send to Lady Betty when I saw the fatal tidings in the newspaper. I see, by the same channel, that the honoured REMAINS of my noble patron are designed to be brought to the family burial-place. Dare I trouble you to let me know privately before the day of interment, that I may cross the country, and steal among the crowd, to pay a tear to the last sight of my ever-revered benefactor ? It will oblige me beyond expression.

R. B.

TO LADY E. CUNNINGHAM.<sup>1</sup>

MY LADY—I would, as usual, have availed myself of the privilege your goodness has allowed me, of sending you anything I compose in my poetical way ; but as I had resolved, so soon as the shock of my irreparable loss would allow me, to pay a tribute to my late benefactor, I determined to make that the first piece I should do myself the honour of sending you. Had the wing of my fancy been equal to the ardour of my heart, the enclosed had been much more worthy your perusal : as it is, I beg leave to lay it at your ladyship's feet.<sup>2</sup> As all the world knows my obligations to the late Earl of Glencairn, I would wish to shew, as openly, that my heart glows, and shall ever glow, with the most grateful sense and remembrance of his lordship's goodness. The sables I did myself the honour to wear to his lordship's memory were not the 'mockery of wo.' Nor shall my gratitude perish with me ! If among my children I shall have a son that has a heart, he shall hand it down to his child as a family honour and a family debt, that my dearest existence I owe to the noble house of Glencairn !

I was about to say, my lady, that if you think the poem may venture to see the light, I would, in some way or other, give it to the world.

R. B.

In the latter part of March, Burns had the misfortune to come down with his horse and break his right arm. Janet Little, the poetical milkmaid, had come to see him, and was waiting at Ellisland when the bard returned in the disabled state to which he had been reduced by the accident. She has related in simple verse her own painful alarm when the sad intelligence resounded through his hall, the sympathy with which she regarded the tears of his affectionate Jean, and the double embarrassment she experienced in greeting at such a crisis the illustrious poet whom she had formerly trembled to meet at all.<sup>3</sup> In the course of a few weeks he was so far recovered as to write with his own hand.

## TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 7th [April] 1791.

WHEN I tell you, madam, that by a fall, not from my horse, but with my horse, I have been a cripple some time, and that this is the first day my arm and hand have been able to serve me in writing, you will allow that it is too good an apology for my seemingly

<sup>1</sup> Sister of the recently deceased, and of the then existing, Earls of Glencairn. Her ladyship died unmarried, August 1804.

<sup>2</sup> The poem enclosed was the *Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn*.

<sup>3</sup> Contemporaries of Burns, p. 82.

ungrateful silence. I am now getting better, and am able to rhyme a little, which implies some tolerable ease, as I cannot think that the most poetic genius is able to compose on the rack.

I do not remember if ever I mentioned to you my having an idea of composing an elegy on the late Miss Burnet of Monboddo. I had the honour of being pretty well acquainted with her, and have seldom felt so much at the loss of an acquaintance, as when I heard that so amiable and accomplished a piece of God's work was no more. I have, as yet, gone no farther than the following fragment, of which please let me have your opinion. You know that elegy is a subject so much exhausted, that any new idea on the business is not to be expected: 'tis well if we can place an old idea in a new light. How far I have succeeded as to this last, you will judge from what follows: \* \* \*

I have proceeded no farther.

Your kind letter, with your kind *remembrance* of your godson, came safe. This last, madam, is scarcely what my pride can bear. As to the little fellow,<sup>1</sup> he is, partiality apart, the finest boy I have for a long time seen. He is now seventeen months old, has the small-pox and measles over, has cut several teeth, and never had a grain of doctors' drugs in his bowels.

I am truly happy to hear that the 'little floweret' is blooming so fresh and fair, and that the 'mother plant' is rather recovering her drooping head. Soon and well may her 'cruel wounds' be healed! I have written thus far with a good deal of difficulty. When I get a little abler, you shall hear farther from, madam, yours,

R. B.

Very soon after, Mrs Burns brought her husband a third son, on whom the appellation of William Nicol was conferred—an individual who has since passed through an honourable military career in India, and is now recognised as Lieutenant-Colonel Burns.

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TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 11th April 1791.

I AM once more able, my honoured friend, to return you, with my own hand, thanks for the many instances of your friendship, and particularly for your kind anxiety in this last disaster that my evil genius had in store for me. However, life is chequered—joy and sorrow—for on Saturday morning last [the 9th], Mrs Burns made me a present of a fine boy; rather stouter, but not so handsome as your godson was at his time of life. Indeed, I look on your little namesake to be my *chef d'œuvre* in that species of manufacture, as I

<sup>1</sup> The infant, Francis Wallace Burns, the poet's second son.

look on *Tam o' Shanter* to be my standard performance in the poetical line. 'Tis true, both the one and the other discover a spice of roguish waggery, that might perhaps be as well spared; but then they also shew, in my opinion, a force of genius, and a finishing polish, that I despair of ever excelling. Mrs Burns is getting stout again, and laid as lustily about her to-day at breakfast as a reaper from the corn-ridge. That is the peculiar privilege and blessing of our hale, sprightly damsels, that are bred among the *hay and heather*. We cannot hope for that highly-polished mind, that charming delicacy of soul, which is found among the female world in the more elevated stations of life, and which is certainly by far the most bewitching charm in the famous cestus of Venus. It is indeed such an inestimable treasure, that where it can be had in its native heavenly purity, unstained by some one or other of the many shades of affectation, and unalloyed by some one or other of the many species of caprice, I declare to Heaven I should think it cheaply purchased at the expense of every other earthly good! But as this angelic creature is, I am afraid, extremely rare in any station and rank of life, and totally denied to such an humble one as mine, we meaner mortals must put up with the next rank of female excellence;—as fine a figure and face we can produce as any rank of life whatever; rustic, native grace; unaffected modesty and unsullied purity; nature's mother-wit, and the rudiments of taste; a simplicity of soul, unsuspicious of, because unacquainted with, the crooked ways of a selfish, interested, disingenuous world; and the dearest charm of all the rest—a yielding sweetness of disposition, and a generous warmth of heart, grateful for love on our part, and ardently glowing with a more than equal return: these, with a healthy frame, a sound, vigorous constitution, which your higher ranks can scarcely ever hope to enjoy, are the charms of lovely woman in my humble walk of life.

This is the greatest effort my broken arm has yet made. Do let me hear, by first post, how *cher petit Monsieur*<sup>1</sup> comes on with his small-pox. May Almighty goodness preserve and restore him! R. B.

Mr Alexander Fraser Tytler, son of the Mr William Tytler with whom Burns had previously corresponded, held an eminent place among the literati of Edinburgh, on account of his learning and taste, although none of his many writings had attained a high degree of popularity. Mr Tytler, having seen *Tam o' Shanter*, was so much pleased with it that he immediately wrote to the poet a letter, which, coming from such a quarter, must have been truly gratifying to him:—

EDINBURGH, 12th March 1791.

DEAR SIR—Mr Hill yesterday put into my hands a sheet of *Grose's Antiquities*, containing a poem of yours entitled *Tam o' Shanter: a tale*. The very high pleasure I have received from the

<sup>1</sup> Mrs Henri's child, and the grandchild of Mrs Dunlop.

perusal of this admirable piece, I feel, demands the warmest acknowledgments. Hill tells me he is to send off a packet for you this day; I cannot resist, therefore, putting on paper what I must have told you in person had I met with you after the recent perusal of your tale—which is, that I feel I owe you a debt, which, if undischarged, would reproach me with ingratitude. I have seldom in my life tasted of higher enjoyment from any work of genius than I have received from this composition; and I am much mistaken if this poem alone, had you never written another syllable, would not have been sufficient to have transmitted your name down to posterity with high reputation. In the introductory part, where you paint the character of your hero, and exhibit him at the alehouse *ingle*, with his tippling cronies, you have delineated nature with a humour and *naïveté* that would do honour to Matthew Prior; but when you describe the infernal orgies of the witches' sabbath, and the hellish scenery in which they are exhibited, you display a power of imagination that Shakspeare himself could not have exceeded. I know not that I have ever met with a picture of more horrible fancy than the following:—

‘ Coffins stood round, like open presses,  
That shawed the dead in their last dresses;  
And, by some devilish cantrip slight,  
Each in its croud hand held a light.’

But when I came to the succeeding lines my blood ran cold within me—

‘ A knife, a father's throat had mangled,  
Whom his ain son of life bereft,  
The gray hairs yet stuck to the heft.’

And here, after the two following lines, ‘ *Wi’ mair o’ horrible and awfu’*, &c., the descriptive part might perhaps have been better closed than the four lines which succeed, which, though good in themselves, yet, as they derive all their merit from the satire they contain, are here rather misplaced among the circumstances of pure horror.<sup>1</sup> The initiation of the young witch is most happily described—the effect of her charms exhibited in the dance of Satan himself—the apostrophe, ‘ *Ah little thought thy reverend grannie!*’—the transport of Tam, who forgets his situation, and enters completely into the spirit of the scene—are all features of high merit in this excellent composition. The only fault it possesses is, that the winding-up, or conclusion of the story, is not commensurate to the interest which is excited by the descriptive and characteristic painting of the preceding parts. The preparation is fine, but the

<sup>1</sup> The four lines were as follow:—

‘ Three lawyers’ tongues turned inside out,  
Wi’ lies seemed like a beggar’s clout;  
And priests’ hearts rotten, black as muck,  
Lay stinking, vile, in every neuk.’

The poet expunged them, in obedience to the recommendation of Mr Tytler.

result is not adequate. But for this perhaps you have a good apology—you stick to the popular tale.

And now that I have got out my mind, and feel a little relieved of the weight of that debt I owed you, let me end this desultory scroll by an advice:—You have proved your talent for a species of composition in which but a very few of our own poets have succeeded. Go on—write more tales in the same style—you will eclipse Prior and La Fontaine; for with equal wit, equal power of numbers, and equal naïveté of expression, you have a bolder and more vigorous imagination.

A. F. T.

‘You have delineated nature with a humour and naïveté that would do honour to Matthew Prior.’ It certainly would!

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TO A. F. TYTLER, ESQ.

ELLISLAND [April] 1791.

SIR—Nothing less than the unfortunate accident I have met with could have prevented my grateful acknowledgments for your letter. His own favourite poem, and that an essay in the walk of the Muses entirely new to him, where consequently his hopes and fears were on the most anxious alarm for his success in the attempt—to have that poem so much applauded by one of the first judges, was the most delicious vibration that ever thrilled along the heart-strings of a poor poet. However, Providence, to keep up the proper proportion of evil with the good, which it seems is necessary in this sub-lunary state, thought proper to check my exultation by a very serious misfortune. A day or two after I received your letter, my horse came down with me and broke my right arm. As this is the first service my arm has done me since its disaster, I find myself unable to do more than just, in general terms, thank you for this additional instance of your patronage and friendship. As to the faults you detected in the piece, they are truly there; one of them, the hit at the lawyer and priest, I shall cut out: as to the falling off in the catastrophe, for the reason you justly adduce, it cannot easily be remedied. Your approbation, sir, has given me such additional spirits to persevere in this species of poetic composition, that I am already revolving two or three stories in my fancy. If I can bring these floating ideas to bear any kind of embodied form, it will give me an additional opportunity of assuring you how much I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

While confined with his broken arm, Burns had the pleasure of receiving a valuable mark of that regard with which a common Jacobitism had inspired Lady Winifred Maxwell Constable, in the form of a snuff-box, containing on the lid a beautiful miniature of Queen Mary.



TO LADY W. M. CONSTABLE.

ELLISLAND, 11th April 1791.

MY LADY—Nothing less than the unlucky accident of having lately broken my right arm could have prevented me, the moment I received your ladyship's elegant present by Mrs Miller, from returning you my warmest and most grateful acknowledgments. I assure your ladyship I shall set it apart—the symbols of religion shall only be more sacred. In the moment of poetic composition the box shall be my inspiring genius. When I would breathe the comprehensive wish of benevolence for the happiness of others, I shall recollect your ladyship; when I would interest my fancy in the distresses incident to humanity, I shall remember the unfortunate Mary.

R. B.

Many years after, one of the poet's sons, having taken this box with him to India, had the misfortune to damage the portrait irreparably in leaping on board a vessel.

Before Burns had been long recovered from the fall by which his arm was broken, he seems to have met with a new misfortune of the same kind, which, however, only sent him to his chamber with a bruised leg. He had about the same time finally decided to give up his farm, a step which he deemed necessary in order to escape ruin, and to which he was of course the less averse, as he was now led to expect speedy promotion in the Excise.

TO MR PETER HILL, EDINBURGH.

[Summer, 1791.]

MY DEAR FRIEND—I was never more unfit for writing. A poor devil, nailed to an elbow-chair, writhing in anguish with a bruised leg laid on a stool before him, is in a fine situation truly for saying bright things.

I may perhaps see you about Martinmas. I have sold to my landlord the lease of my farm, and as I rous off everything then, I have a mind to take a week's excursion to see old-acquaintance. At all events you may reckon on [payment of] your account about that time. So much for business. I do not know if I ever informed you that I am now got ranked on the list as a supervisor, and I have pretty good reason to believe that I shall soon be called out to employment. The appointment is worth from one to two hundred a year, according to the place of the country in which one is settled. I have not been so lucky in my farming. Mr Miller's kindness has been just such another as Creech's was :

‘His meddling vanity, a busy fiend,

Still making work his selfish craft must mend.’

By the way, I have taken vengeance on Creech. He wrote me a fine,

fair letter, telling me that he was going to print a third edition; and as he had a brother's care of my fame, he wished to add every new thing I have written since, and I should be amply rewarded with—a copy or two to present to my friends. He has sent me a copy of the last edition<sup>1</sup> to correct, &c. But I have as yet taken no notice of it; and I hear he has published without me. You know, and all my friends know, that I do not value money; but I owed the gentleman a debt, which I am happy to have it in my power to repay.

Farewell, and prosperity attend all your undertakings! I shall try, if my unlucky limb would give me a little ease, to write you a letter a little better worth reading.

R. B.

If we would see the entire Burns, we must hear such sentiments as these which he avows respecting Miller and Creech, as well as listen to his meek epistles to Mrs Dunlop. Some will think the vengeance he speaks of was after all a gentle one, as from an irate poet against a publisher.

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TO ———

ELLISLAND, 1791.

DEAR SIR—I am exceedingly to blame in not writing you long ago; but the truth is, that I am the most indolent of all human beings, and when I matriculate in the Herald's Office, I intend that my supporters shall be two sloths, my crest a slow-worm, and the motto, 'Deil tak the foremost.' So much by way of apology for not thanking you sooner for your kind execution of my commission.

I would have sent you the poem; but somehow or other it found its way into the public papers, where you must have seen it. I am ever, dear sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

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TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

11th June 1791.

LET me interest you, my dear Cunningham, in behalf of the gentleman who waits on you with this. He is a Mr Clarke of Moffat, principal schoolmaster there, and is at present suffering severely under the persecution of one or two powerful individuals of his employers. He is accused of harshness to boys that were placed

<sup>1</sup> Creech advertised a new edition of Burns's Poems in July 1790. In September 1791, Mr Davies wrote to Mr Creech: 'Mr Cadell says he believes he wrote you about the new edition of Burns's Poems; but in case he has not, he bids me tell you, sir, that he recommends 1000 to be printed in 2 vols. crown 8vo, on a fine wove paper, and that it be finished in two or three months, in time for his sale.'

under his care. God help the teacher, if a man of sensibility and genius—and such is my friend Clarke—when a booby father presents him with his booby son, and insists on lighting up the rays of science in a fellow's head whose skull is impervious and inaccessible by any other way than a positive fracture with a cudgel : a fellow whom, in fact, it savours of impiety to attempt making a scholar of, as he has been marked a blockhead in the book of fate at the Almighty fiat of his Creator.

The patrons of Moffat School are the ministers, magistrates, and town-council of Edinburgh ; and as the business comes now before them, let me beg my dearest friend to do everything in his power to serve the interests of a man of genius and worth, and a man whom I particularly respect and esteem. You know some good fellows among the magistracy and council ; but particularly you have much to say with a reverend gentleman to whom you have the honour of being very nearly related, and whom this country and age have had the honour to produce. I need not name the historian of Charles V.<sup>1</sup> I tell him, through the medium of his nephew's influence, that Mr Clarke is a gentleman who will not disgrace even his patronage. I know the merits of the cause thoroughly, and say it, that my friend is falling a sacrifice to prejudiced ignorance, and . . .

God help the children of dependence ! Hated and persecuted by their enemies, and too often, alas ! almost unexceptionably, received by their friends with disrespect and reproach, under the thin disguise of cold civility and humiliating advice. O to be a sturdy savage, stalking in the pride of his independence, amid the solitary wilds of his deserts, rather than in civilised life helplessly to tremble for a subsistence, precarious as the caprice of a fellow-creature ! Every man has his virtues, and no man is without his failings ; and curse on that privileged plain-dealing of friendship which, in the hour of my calamity, cannot reach forth the helping-hand without at the same time pointing out those failings, and apportioning them their share in procuring my present distress. My friends—for such the world calls ye, and such ye think yourselves to be—pass by my virtues if you please, but do also spare my follies : the first will witness in my breast for themselves, and the last will give pain enough to the ingenuous mind without you. And since deviating more or less from the paths of propriety and rectitude must be incident to human nature, do thou, Fortune, put it in my power, always from myself and of myself, to bear the consequence of those errors ! I do not want to be independent that I may sin, but I want to be independent in my sinning.

To return in this rambling letter to the subject I set out with, let me recommend my friend Mr Clarke to your acquaintance and good offices—his worth entitles him to the one, and his gratitude will merit the other. I long much to hear from you. Adieu !

R. B.

<sup>1</sup> Mr Cunningham was nephew to Dr Robertson.

There is something arresting in this letter. While merely recommending a persecuted schoolmaster to a friend's protection, thus to launch out into a general apology for hurtful failings, and an indignant protest against the friendship which would preach upon them even while redeeming their consequences, powerfully claims our attention amidst the obscurity which prevails regarding the details of Burns's private life and the varying current of his feelings at different times. We know that the poet was now convinced that his farming scheme was a failure, and that much of the little capital arising from the profits of his poems was irretrievably gone. But the suffering from that cause could never, alone, have wrung from him such an outpouring of bitter feeling. It is the more remarkable as the commencement of a series of such tirades which extended at intervals through the remainder of his life. From this time forth, indeed, we are to see a chronic exasperation of spirit affecting the life and conversation of the luckless bard. We get but slight and casual glimpses of the cause of all this acrimony; but I am assured that it would be a great mistake to attribute it wholly, or in any considerable part, to a mere jarring between the sensitive spirit of the poet and the rude contact of the worldly scene into which he was plunged. Burns did not want for a certain worldly wisdom and hardness. His poetical powers had not in themselves exposed him to any serious evils. On the contrary, he was indebted to them for any advance in the social scene which he ever made, and even for such endowments of fortune as had befallen him. Neither was Burns so unworthily regarded by either high or low in his own day and place, as to have much occasion for complaint on that score. On the contrary, he had obtained the respectful regard of many of the very choicest men and women of his country. Whenever he appeared in aristocratic circles, his acknowledged genius and the charms of his conversation gave him a distinction not always readily yielded to mere wealth and rank. No, we have to look elsewhere for an explanation of the mystery: it seems to have mainly lain in the reckless violence of some of his passions, by the consequences of which he was every now and then exposed to humiliations galling to his pride. It was a refuge to his wounded feelings to suppose that these passions were essentially connected with his poetical character. But we shall have hereafter to consider this subject more fully.

There is a condition of great suffering, when, though the main source of grief cannot be spoken of, smaller evils will be denounced with a superfluity of splenetic effusion not a little startling to the bystander. Burns appears about this time to have been subjected, either in public or private, to a searching

hypercriticism, probably of a kind beneath his notice. The following fragment was perhaps designed as part of a private reply to the critic:—

[LITERARY SCOLDING.]

THOU eunuch of language : thou Englishman, who never was south the Tweed : thou servile echo of fashionable barbarisms : thou quack, vending the nostrums of empirical elocution : thou marriage-maker between vowels and consonants, on the Gretna Green of caprice : thou cobbler, botching the flimsy socks of bombast oratory : thou blacksmith, hammering the rivets of absurdity : thou butcher, imbruing thy hands in the bowels of orthography : thou arch-heretic in pronunciation : thou pitch-pipe of affected emphasis : thou carpenter, mortising the awkward joints of jarring sentences : thou squeaking dissonance of cadence : thou pimp of gender : thou Lion Herald to silly etymology : thou antipode of grammar : thou executioner of construction : thou brood of the speech-distracting builders of the Tower of Babel : thou lingual confusion worse confounded : thou scape-gallows from the land of syntax : thou scavenger of mood and tense : thou murderous accoucheur of infant learning : thou *ignis fatuus*, misleading the steps of benighted ignorance : thou pickle-herring in the puppet-show of nonsense : thou faithful recorder of barbarous idiom : thou persecutor of syllabication : thou baleful meteor, foretelling and facilitating the rapid approach of Nox and Erebus.<sup>1</sup>

The same petty subject of resentment rides through an epistle to his patron Graham, while in reality his anguished bosom acknowledged deeper sources of woe:—

THIRD EPISTLE TO MR GRAHAM OF FINTRY.

[Summer, 1791.]

Late crippled of an arm, and now a leg,  
About to beg a pass for leave to beg :  
Dull, listless, teased, dejected, and deprest,  
(Nature is adverse to a cripple's rest);  
Will generous Graham list to his Poet's wail ?  
(It soothes poor misery, hearkening to her tale),  
And hear him curse the light he first surveyed,  
And doubly curse the luckless rhyming trade !

Thou, Nature, partial Nature ! I arraign ;  
Of thy caprice maternal I complain.

<sup>1</sup> This singular composition made its appearance in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for August 1832, without date or signature. The original manuscript was in the possession of the late Mr Andrew Henderson, surgeon, Berwick-upon-Tweed, one of the sons of the *Rose-bud*.

The lion and the bull thy care have found,  
 One shakes the forests, and one spurns the ground :  
 Thou giv'st the ass his hide, the snail his shell,  
 Th' envenomed wasp, victorious, guards his cell ;  
 Thy minions, kings, defend, control, devour,  
 In all th' omnipotence of rule and power ;  
 Foxes and statesmen, subtle wiles insure :  
 The cit and polecat stink, and are secure ;  
 Toads with their poison, doctors with their drug,  
 The priest and hedgehog in their robes are snug ;  
 Ev'n silly woman has her warlike arts,  
 Her tongue and eyes, her dreaded spear and darts ;—  
 But, oh ! thou bitter stepmother and hard,  
 To thy poor, fenceless, naked child—the Bard !  
 A thing unteachable in world's skill,  
 And half an idiot, too, more helpless still :  
 No heels to bear him from the opening dun ;  
 No claws to dig, his hated sight to shun ;  
 No horns, but those by luckless Hymen worn,  
 And those, alas ! not Amalthea's horn :  
 No nerve olfactory, Mammon's trusty cur,  
 Clad in rich dulness' comfortable fur ;—  
 In naked feeling, and in aching pride,  
 He bears the unbroken blast from every side :  
 Vampyre booksellers drain him to the heart,  
 And scorpion critics cureless venom dart.

Critics !—appalled I venture on the name,  
 Those cut-throat bandits in the paths of fame :  
 Bloody dissectors, worse than ten Monroes !<sup>1</sup>  
 He hacks to teach, they mangle to expose.

His heart by causeless wanton malice wrung,  
 By blockheads' daring into madness stung ;  
 His well-won bays, than life itself more dear,  
 By miscreants torn, who ne'er one sprig must wear :  
 Foiled, bleeding, tortured, in the unequal strife,  
 The hapless poet flounders on through life ;  
 Till fled each hope that once his bosom fired,  
 And fled each muse that glorious once inspired,  
 Low sunk in squalid, unprotected age,  
 Dead, even resentment, for his injured page,  
 He heeds or feels no more the ruthless critic's rage !

So, by some hedge, the generous steed deceased,  
 For half-starved snarling curs a dainty feast :  
 By toil and famine wore to skin and bone,  
 Lies senseless of each tugging bitch's son.

<sup>1</sup> Alluding to the eminent anatomist, Professor Alexander Monro, of the Edinburgh University.

O dulness ! portion of the truly blest !  
 Calm sheltered haven of eternal rest !  
 Thy sons ne'er madden in the fierce extremes  
 Of fortune's polar frost, or torrid beams.  
 If mantling high she fills the golden cup,  
 With sober selfish ease they sip it up :  
 Conscious the bounteous meed they well deserve,  
 They only wonder ' some folks ' do not starve.  
 The grave sage hern thus easy picks his frog,  
 And thinks the mallard a sad worthless dog.  
 When disappointment snaps the clue of hope,  
 And through disastrous night they darkling grope,  
 With deaf endurance sluggishly they bear,  
 And just conclude that ' fools are fortune's care.'  
 So, heavy, passive to the tempest's shocks,  
 Strong on the sign-post stands the stupid ox.  
 Not so the idle Muses' mad-cap train,  
 Not such the workings of their moon-struck brain ;  
 In equanimity they never dwell,  
 By turns in soaring heaven or vaulted hell.

I dread thee, fate, relentless and severe,  
 With all a poet's, husband's, father's fear !  
 Already one strong hold of hope is lost,  
 Glencairn, the truly noble, lies in dust ;  
 (Fled, like the sun eclipsed as noon appears,  
 And left us darkling in a world of tears :)  
 O hear my ardent, grateful, selfish prayer !—  
 Fintry, my other stay, long bless and spare !  
 Through a long life his hopes and wishes crown,  
 And bright in cloudless skies his sun go down !  
 May bliss domestic smooth his private path,  
 Give energy to life, and soothe his latest breath,  
 With many a filial tear circling the bed of death !

As the summer moved on, Burns seems to have recovered from both bruises and vexations, and to have regained some degree of equanimity.

TO [MR PETER HILL.]

[DUMFRIES, 13th July 1791.<sup>1</sup>]

MY DEAR FRIEND—I take Glenriddel's kind offer of a corner for a postscript to you, though I have nothing particular to tell you. It is with the greatest pleasure I learn from all hands, and particularly from your warm friend and patron, the Laird here, that you are going on, spreading and thriving like the palm-tree that shades the fragrant vale in the Holy Land of the Prophet. May the richest

<sup>1</sup> The date is supplied in a different hand. A post-mark indicates 'Ju. 14.'

juices from beneath, and the dews of heaven from above, foster your root and refresh your branches, until you be as conspicuous among your fellows as the stately Goliath towering over the little pigmy Philistines around him! Amen, so be it!!!

R. B.

At this time we have a picturesque presentment of Burns from the pen of Dr Currie:—‘In the summer of 1791 two English gentlemen, who had before met with him in Edinburgh, paid a visit to him at Ellisland. On calling at the house, they were informed that he had walked out on the banks of the river; and dismounting from their horses, they proceeded in search of him. On a rock that projected into the stream, they saw a man employed in angling, of a singular appearance. He had a cap made of a fox’s skin on his head, a loose greatcoat fixed round him by a belt, from which depended an enormous Highland broadsword. It was Burns. He received them with great cordiality, and asked them to share his humble dinner—an invitation which they accepted. On the table they found boiled beef, with vegetables, and barley-broth, after the manner of Scotland, of which they partook heartily. After dinner, the bard told them ingenuously that he had no wine to offer them—nothing better than Highland whisky, a bottle of which Mrs Burns set on the board. He produced at the same time his punch-bowl, made of Inverary marble; and, mixing the spirit with water and sugar, filled their glasses, and invited them to drink.<sup>1</sup> The travellers were in haste, and, besides, the flavour of the whisky to their *suthron* palates was scarcely tolerable; but the generous poet offered them his best, and his ardent hospitality they found it impossible to resist. Burns was in his happiest mood, and the charms of his conversation were altogether fascinating. He ranged over a great variety of topics, illuminating whatever he touched. He related the tales of his infancy and of his youth; he recited some of the gayest and some of the tenderest of his poems: in the wildest of his strains of mirth he threw in some touches of melancholy, and spread around him the electric emotions of his powerful mind. The Highland whisky improved in its flavour; the marble bowl was again and again emptied and replenished; the guests of our poet forgot the flight of time and the dictates of prudence: at the hour of midnight they lost their way in returning to Dumfries,

<sup>1</sup> The bowl here referred to was formed of *lapis-ollaris*, the stone of which Inverary Castle is built. It was fashioned by the hands of Mr Armour of Mauchline, and presented by him as a marriage-gift to his famous son-in-law. After the poet’s death, it fell into the hands of Mr Alexander Cunningham of Edinburgh, from which again it passed to those of Mr Hastie, representative of Paisley in several parliaments, who is said to have refused three hundred guineas for it, a sum that would have set Burns on his legs for ever!



and could scarcely distinguish it when assisted by the morning's dawn.<sup>1</sup>

TO MR THOMAS SLOAN.

ELLISLAND, 1st Sept. 1791.

MY DEAR SLOAN—Suspense is worse than disappointment; for that reason I hurry to tell you that I just now learn that Mr Ballantine does not choose to interfere more in the business. I am truly sorry for it, but cannot help it.

You blame me for not writing you sooner; but you will please to recollect that you omitted one little necessary piece of information—your address.

However, you know equally well my hurried life, indolent temper, and strength of attachment. It must be a longer period than the longest life 'in the world's hale and undegenerate days,' that will make me forget so dear a friend as Mr Sloan. I am prodigal enough at times, but I will not part with such a treasure as that.

I can easily enter into the *embarras* of your present situation. You know my favourite quotation from Young—

———' On Reason build RESOLVE!  
That column of true majesty in man.'

And that other favourite one from Thomson's *Alfred*—

'What proves the hero truly GREAT,  
Is, never, never to despair.'

Or, shall I quote you an author of your acquaintance?

———'Whether DOING, SUFFERING, or FORBEARING,  
You may do miracles by—PERSEVERING.'

I have nothing new to tell you. The few friends we have are going on in the old way. I sold my crop on this day se'en-night, and sold it very well. A guinea an acre, on an average, above value. But such a scene of drunkenness was hardly ever seen in this country. After the rous was over, about thirty people engaged in a battle, every man for his own hand, and fought it out for three hours. Nor was the scene much better in the house. No fighting, indeed, but folks lying drunk on the floor, and decanting, until both my dogs got so drunk by attending them that they could not stand. You will easily guess how I enjoyed the scene, as I was no farther over than you used to see me.

Mrs B. and family have been in Ayrshire these many weeks.

Farewell! and God bless you, my dear friend!

R. B.

<sup>1</sup> Given from the information of one of the party.

The reader must not suppose that Burns had given any special encouragement to the glass at the sale of his crop. It was the custom on such occasions to produce a quantity of whisky or some similar liquor, from which the persons attending the sale were expected to help themselves at discretion. The common belief was, that without this attraction there might be a difficulty in assembling a company, and that without such a stimulus to bidding the stock would go off at prices beneath its value. Such matters are usually left to the auctioneer, and probably on this occasion our poet was passive in all respects but that of an observer of self-degraded human nature. There is seldom any excess now-a-days; but still the bottle never fails to appear side by side with the auctioneer.

The Earl of Buchan, whose connection with the Glencairn family gave him a claim on Burns's consideration which he could never have derived from his own character, was at this time contemplating one of the puerile fêtes for which he had so restless a propensity, the ostensible object being the inauguration of a temple built to Thomson the poet on Ednam Hill, while the true one was the glorification of the Earl of Buchan. His lordship wrote to Burns, requesting his presence on the occasion, and suggesting that he should 'go across the country, and meet the Tweed at the nearest point to his farm—and wandering along the pastoral banks of Thomson's pure parent stream, catch inspiration on the devious walk, till he finds Lord Buchan sitting on the ruins of Dryburgh. There,' he adds, 'the Commendator [for so he considered himself, as being the successor of the ancient abbots] will give him [Burns] a hearty welcome, and try to light his lamp at the pure flame of native genius upon the altar of Caledonian virtue!' Burns gave a courteous and conceding answer:

#### TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.

ELLISLAND, [September] 1790.

MY LORD—Language sinks under the ardour of my feelings when I would thank your lordship for the honour you have done me in inviting me to make one at the coronation of the bust of Thomson. In my first enthusiasm in reading the card you did me the honour to write me, I overlooked every obstacle, and determined to go; but I fear it will not be in my power. A week or two's absence, in the very middle of my harvest, is what I much doubt I dare not venture on. I once already made a pilgrimage *up* the whole course of the Tweed,<sup>1</sup> and fondly would I take the same delightful journey *down* the windings of that delightful stream.

<sup>1</sup> In reality, only to Innerleithen.

Your lordship hints at an ode for the occasion ; but who would write after Collins? I read over his verses to the memory of Thomson, and despaired. I got indeed to the length of three or four stanzas, in the way of address to the shade of the bard, on crowning his bust. I shall trouble your lordship with the subjoined copy of them, which, I am afraid, will be but too convincing a proof how unequal I am to the task. However, it affords me an opportunity of approaching your lordship, and declaring how sincerely and gratefully I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

## ADDRESS TO THE SHADE OF THOMSON,

ON CROWNING HIS BUST AT EDNAM, ROXBURGHSHIRE, WITH BAYS.

While virgin Spring, by Eden's flood,  
Unfolds her tender mantle green,  
Or pranks the sod in frolic mood,  
Or tunes Æolian strains between :

While Summer with a matron grace  
Retreats to Dryburgh's cooling shade,  
Yet oft, delighted, stops to trace  
The progress of the spiky blade :

While Autumn, benefactor kind,  
By Tweed erects his aged head,  
And sees, with self-approving mind,  
Each creature on his bounty fed :

While maniac Winter rages o'er  
The hills whence classic Yarrow flows,  
Rousing the turbid torrent's roar,  
Or sweeping, wild, a waste of snows :

So long, sweet Poet of the year!  
Shall bloom that wreath thou well hast won ;  
While Scotia, with exulting tear,  
Proclaims that Thomson was her son.

Burns, in looking into Collins for his verses to the memory of Thomson, had probably glanced at the same poet's exquisite *Ode to Evening*, for the three concluding verses are manifestly imitated in this address :

'While Spring shall pour his showers, as oft he wont,  
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve :  
While Summer loves to sport  
Beneath thy lingering light :

While fallow Autumn fills thy cup with leaves,  
Or Winter, yelling through the troublous air,  
Affrights thy shrinking train,  
And rudely rends thy robes:

So long, regardful of thy quiet rule,  
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, smiling Peace,  
'Thy gentlest influence own,  
And love thy favourite name !'

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TO COLONEL FULLARTON, OF FULLARTON.<sup>1</sup>

ELLISLAND, October 3, 1791.

SIR—I have just this minute got the frank, and next minute must send it to post ; else I purposed to have sent you two or three other bagatelles that might have amused a vacant hour, about as well as *Six Excellent New Songs*, or the *Aberdeen Prognostications for the Year to come*.<sup>2</sup> I shall probably trouble you soon with another packet : about the gloomy month of November, when the people of England hang and drown themselves, anything generally is better than one's own thoughts.

Fond as I may be of my own productions, it is not for their sake that I am so anxious to send you them. I am ambitious, covetously ambitious, of being known to a gentleman whom I am proud to call my countryman ;<sup>3</sup> a gentleman, who was a foreign ambassador as soon as he was a man, and a leader of armies as soon as he was a soldier, and that with an *éclat* unknown to the usual minions of a court—men who, with all the adventitious advantages of princely connections and princely fortunes, must yet, like the caterpillar, labour a whole lifetime before they reach the wished-for height, there to roost a stupid chrysalis, and doze out the remaining glimmering existence of old age.

If the gentleman that accompanied you when you did me the honour of calling on me, is with you, I beg to be respectfully remembered to him. I have the honour to be your highly obliged, and most devoted humble servant,

R. B.

Burns had become acquainted, probably at Friars' Carse, with

<sup>1</sup> This gentleman, it will be recollected, is honourably mentioned in *The Vision*. The letter first appeared in the *Paisley Magazine*, 1828. For the favourable opinion which he entertained of Burns, see the present volume, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> A conspicuous branch of popular literature in Scotland till a recent period consisted of coarse brochures of four leaves, sold at a halfpenny, and generally containing something appropriate to the title of '*Six Excellent New Songs—viz.*' &c. The other branch of popular literature mentioned in the text consisted of almanacs, published at Aberdeen, at the price of a penny.

<sup>3</sup> Meaning a native of the same county.

a beautiful young Englishwoman, a relation of the Riddels, and also connected by the marriage of a sister with the noble family of Kenmure in the neighbouring stewartry. Deborah Davies—for this was her name—was of small stature, but exquisitely handsome, and she possessed more than an average share of mental graces. With his usual sensibility to female beauty, but especially that of a refined and educated woman, Burns became an idolater of Miss Davies, and the feelings which possessed him soon led to an effusion of both prose and verse.

#### TO MISS DAVIES.

MADAM—I understand my very worthy neighbour, Mr Riddel, has informed you that I have made you the subject of some verses. There is something so provoking in the idea of being the burden of a ballad, that I do not think Job or Moses, though such patterns of patience and meekness, could have resisted the curiosity to know what that ballad was; so my worthy friend has done me a mischief, which I daresay he never intended, and reduced me to the unfortunate alternative of leaving your curiosity ungratified, or else disgusting you with foolish verses, the unfinished production of a random moment, and never meant to have met your ear. I have heard or read somewhere of a gentleman who had some genius, much eccentricity, and very considerable dexterity with his pencil. In the accidental group of life into which one is thrown, wherever this gentleman met with a character in a more than ordinary degree congenial to his heart, he used to steal a sketch of the face; merely, he said, as a *nota bene*, to point out the agreeable recollection to his memory. What this gentleman's pencil was to him, my Muse is to me; and the verses I do myself the honour to send you are a *memento* exactly of the same kind that he indulged in.

It may be more owing to the fastidiousness of my caprice than the delicacy of my taste, but I am so often tired, disgusted, and hurt with the insipidity, affectation, and pride of mankind, that when I meet with a person 'after my own heart,' I positively feel what an orthodox Protestant would call a species of idolatry, which acts on my fancy like inspiration; and I can no more desist rhyming on the impulse, than an Æolian harp can refuse its tones to the streaming air. A distich or two would be the consequence, though the object which hit my fancy were gray-bearded age; but where my theme is youth and beauty, a young lady whose personal charms, wit, and sentiment, are equally striking and unaffected—by Heavens! though I had lived threescore years a married man, and threescore years before I was a married man, my imagination would hallow the very idea: and I am truly sorry that the enclosed stanzas have done such poor justice to such a subject.

R. B.

## LOVELY DAVIES.

TUNE—*Miss Muir.*

O how shall I, unskilfu', try  
 The poet's occupation,  
 The tunefu' powers, in happy hours,  
 That whisper inspiration!  
 Even they maun dare an effort mair  
 Than aught they ever gave us,  
 Ere they rehearse, in equal verse,  
 The charms o' lovely Davies.

Each eye it cheers, when she appears,  
 Like Phœbus in the morning,  
 When past the shower, and every flower  
 The garden is adorning.  
 As the wretch looks o'er Siberia's shore,  
 When winter-bound the wave is;  
 Sae droops our heart when we maun part  
 Frae charming, lovely Davies.

Her smile's a gift, frae 'boon the lift,  
 That makes us mair than princes;  
 A scepter'd hand, a king's command,  
 Is in her darting glances:  
 The man in arms, 'gainst female charms,  
 Even he her willing slave is;  
 He hugs his chain, and owns the reign  
 Of conquering, lovely Davies.

My Muse to dream of such a theme,  
 Her feeble powers surrender;  
 The eagle's gaze alone surveys  
 The sun's meridian splendour:  
 I wad in vain essay the strain,  
 The deed too daring brave is;  
 I'll drop the lyre, and mute admire  
 The charms o' lovely Davies.

Burns afterwards canonised the lady still more effectively in a briefer but more sentimental ditty, which had the good fortune to be conceived in connection with one of the most tenderly-beautiful of the national airs.

## THE BONNIE WEE THING.

TUNE—*Bonnie wee Thing.*

Bonnie wee thing, cannie wee thing,  
 Lovely wee thing, wert thou mine,  
 I wad wear thee in my bosom,  
 Lest my jewel I should tine!

Wishfully I look and languish  
 In that bonnie face o' thine ;  
 And my heart it stounds wi' anguish,  
 Lest my wee thing be na mine,

Wit, and grace, and love, and beauty,  
 In ae constellation shine ;  
 To adore thee is my duty,  
 Goddess o' this soul o' mine !  
 Bonnie wee thing, cannie wee thing,  
 Lovely wee thing, wert thou mine,  
 I wad wear thee in my bosom,  
 Lest my jewel I should tine !

'One day, while Burns was at Moffat'—thus writes Allan Cunningham—'the charming, lovely Davies rode past, accompanied by a lady tall and portly: on a friend asking the poet, why God made one lady so large, and Miss Davies so little, he replied in the words of the epigram:'

Ask why God made the gem so small,  
 And why so huge the granite?  
 Because God meant mankind should set  
 The higher value on it.

'No one,' adds Allan, 'has apologised so handsomely for scrimpit stature.'

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#### TO MISS DAVIES.

It is impossible, madam, that the generous warmth and angelic purity of your youthful mind can have any idea of that moral disease under which I unhappily must rank as the chief of sinners: I mean a torpidity of the moral powers, that may be called a lethargy of conscience. In vain Remorse rears her horrent crest, and rouses all her snakes: beneath the deadly fixed eye and leaden hand of Indolence, their wildest ire is charmed into the torpor of the bat, slumbering out the rigours of winter in the chink of a ruined wall. Nothing less, madam, could have made me so long neglect your obliging commands. Indeed, I had one apology—the bagatelle was not worth presenting. Besides, so strongly am I interested in Miss Davies's fate and welfare in the serious business of life, amid its chances and changes, that to make her the subject of a silly ballad is downright mockery of these ardent feelings; 'tis like an impertinent jest to a dying friend.

Gracious Heaven! why this disparity between our wishes and our powers? Why is the most generous wish to make others blest

impotent and ineffectual, as the idle breeze that crosses the pathless desert? In my walks of life I have met with a few people to whom how gladly would I have said: 'Go! be happy! I know that your hearts have been wounded by the scorn of the proud, whom accident has placed above you—or, worse still, in whose hands are perhaps placed many of the comforts of your life. But there! ascend that rock, Independence, and look justly down on their littleness of soul. Make the worthless tremble under your indignation, and the foolish sink before your contempt; and largely impart that happiness to others which, I am certain, will give yourselves so much pleasure to bestow.'

Why, dear madam, must I wake from this delightful reverie, and find it all a dream? Why, amid my generous enthusiasm, must I find myself poor and powerless, incapable of wiping one tear from the eye of Pity, or of adding one comfort to the friend I love! Out upon the world! say I, that its affairs are administered so ill! They talk of reform; good Heaven! what a reform would I make among the sons, and even the daughters, of men! Down immediately should go fools from the high places where misbegotten chance has perked them up, and through life should they skulk, ever-haunted by their native insignificance, as the body marches accompanied by its shadow. As for a much more formidable class, the knaves, I am at a loss what to do with them: had I a world, there should not be a knave in it.

But the hand that could give, I would liberally fill; and I would pour delight on the heart that could kindly forgive, and generously love.

Still, the inequalities of life are, among men, comparatively tolerable—but there is a delicacy, a tenderness, accompanying every view in which we can place lovely woman, that are grated and shocked at the rude, capricious distinctions of Fortune. Woman is the blood-royal of life: let there be slight degrees of precedency among them—but let them be ALL sacred. Whether this last sentiment be right or wrong, I am not accountable: it is an original component feature of my mind.

R. B.

Allan Cunningham relates the romantic subsequent history of Miss Davies, from the information of a nephew of the lady. A Captain Delany 'made himself acceptable to her by sympathising in her pursuits, and writing verses on her, calling her his Stella, an ominous name, which might have brought the memory of Swift's unhappy mistress to her mind. An offer of marriage was made and accepted; but Delany's circumstances were urged as an obstacle: delays ensued: a coldness on the lover's part followed: his regiment was called abroad, he went with it: she heard from him once and no more, and was left to mourn the change of affection—to droop and die. He perished in battle or by a foreign climate, soon



after the death of the young lady, of whose love he was so unworthy.

“The following verses on this unfortunate attachment form part of a poem found among her papers at her death: she takes Delany’s portrait from her bosom, presses it to her lips, and says—

“Next to thyself, ’tis all on earth,  
Thy Stella dear doth hold;  
The glass is clouded with my breath,  
And as my bosom cold:  
That bosom which so oft has glowed,  
With love and friendship’s name,  
Where you the seed of love first sowed,  
That kindled into flame.

You there neglected let it burn,  
It seized the vital part,  
And left my bosom as an urn,  
To hold a broken heart;  
I once had thought I should have been  
A tender, happy wife,  
And passed my future days serene,  
With thee, my James, through life.”

Amongst the gentry of Dumfriesshire was one possessed of accomplishments akin to those of Burns—Charles Sharpe of Hoddam, an excellent violinist, and a composer of both music and verse. I am not aware of the publication of any specimen of Mr Sharpe’s poetry; but his son, Mr Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, printed a few years ago an air to the song of *The Ewe-milking’s Bonnie*, which the Laird of Hoddam was believed to have produced upon the stock and horn when only eight years of age; and it certainly is a pleasing example of melody of the Scottish character, and perfectly original. Burns having heard an air of Mr Sharpe’s composition, adopted the whimsical idea of addressing him under a fictitious signature, in the character of a vagrant fiddler:—

TO CHARLES SHARPE, ESQ. OF HODDAM,

ENCLOSING A BALLAD.

It is true, sir, you are a gentleman of rank and fortune, and I am a poor devil—you are a feather in the cap of Society, and I am a very hobnail in his shoes; yet I have the honour to belong to the same family with you, and on that score I now address you. You will perhaps suspect that I am going to claim affinity with the ancient and honourable house of Kirkpatrick. No, no, sir: I cannot indeed be properly said to belong to any house, or even any province or

kingdom ; as my mother, who for many years was spouse to a marching regiment, gave me into this bad world, aboard the packet-boat, somewhere between Donaghadee and Portpatrick. By our common family, I mean, sir, the family of the Muses. I am a fiddler and a poet ; and you, I am told, play an exquisite violin, and have a standard taste in the *Jelles lettres*. The other day, a brother catgut gave me a charming Scots air of your composition. If I was pleased with the tune, I was in raptures with the title you have given it ; and, taking up the idea, I have spun it into the three stanzas enclosed. Will you allow me, sir, to present you them, as the dearest offering that a misbegotten son of poverty and rhyme has to give ! I have a longing to take you by the hand and unburden my heart by saying : ' Sir, I honour you as a man who supports the dignity of human nature, amid an age when frivolity and avarice have, between them, debased us below the brutes that perish ! ' But, alas, sir ! to me you are unapproachable. It is true the Muses baptised me in Castalian streams ; but the thoughtless gipsies forgot to give me a name. As the sex have served many a good fellow, the Nine have given me a great deal of pleasure ; but, bewitching jades ! they have beggared me. Would they but spare me a little of their cast-linen ! were it only to put it in my power to say that I have a shirt on my back ! But the idle wenches, like Solomon's lilies, ' they toil not, neither do they spin ; ' so I must e'en continue to tie my remnant of a cravat, like the hangman's rope, round my naked throat, and coax my galligaskins to keep together their many-coloured fragments. As to the affair of shoes, I have given that up. My pilgrimages in my ballad-trade from town to town, and on your stony-hearted turnpikes too, are what not even the hide of Job's behemoth could bear. The coat on my back is no more : I shall not speak evil of the dead. It would be equally unhandsome and ungrateful to find fault with my old surtout, which so kindly supplies and conceals the want of that coat. My hat, indeed, is a great favourite ; and though I got it literally for an old song, I would not exchange it for the best beaver in Britain. I was during several years a kind of *fac-totum* servant to a country clergyman, where I picked up a good many scraps of learning, particularly in some branches of the mathematics. Whenever I feel inclined to rest myself on my way, I take my seat under a hedge, laying my poetic wallet on the one side, and my fiddle-case on the other, and, placing my hat between my legs, I can by means of its brim, or rather brims, go through the whole doctrine of the conic sections.

However, sir, don't let me mislead you, as if I would interest your pity. Fortune has so much forsaken me, that she has taught me to live without her ; and, amid all my rags and poverty, I am as independent, and much more happy, than a monarch of the world. According to the hackneyed metaphor, I value the several actors in the great drama of life simply as they act their parts. I can look on a worthless fellow of a duke with unqualified contempt, and can regard an honest scavenger with sincere respect. As you, sir, go

through your *role* with such distinguished merit, permit me to make one in the chorus of universal applause, and assure you that, with the highest respect, I have the honour to be, &c.

This queer epistle led to an intimacy between Mr Sharpe and Burns, of which all literary evidence has vanished. The only other memorial of the friendship of the two fiddlers that has appeared is a curious relic in the possession of a gentleman at Whitehaven—namely, a masonic apron described as of ‘shammy leather, very fine, with figures of gold, some of them relieved with green, others with a dark-red colour,’ while ‘on the under side of the semi-circular part which is turned down at the top, is written in a bold fair hand—

“CHARLES SHARPE of Hotham,

TO

RABBIE BURNS.

DUMFRIES, Dec. 12, 1791.”<sup>1</sup>

The local library scheme which Burns had helped to set on foot soon after coming to Ellisland, had now run its three years’ course with success. It had become the duty of Mr Kirkpatrick, the minister of Dunscore, to send an account of his parish to Sir John Sinclair, for publication in the large statistical work which he had commenced: from this the reverend gentleman omitted all reference to the Monkland Library, probably, as Allan Cunningham suggests, from a dislike to the kind of literature patronised by it. Mr Riddel resolved to make up, as far as possible, for this deficiency, and prevailed on Burns to write an account of the library, which he enclosed to Sir John in one from himself. Both letters appeared in the third volume of the *Statistical Account of Scotland*.

TO SIR JOHN SINCLAIR, BART.

SIR JOHN—I enclose you a letter, written by Mr Burns, as an addition to the account of Dunscore parish. It contains an account of a small library which he was so good (at my desire) as to set on foot in the barony of Monkland, or Friars’ Carse, in this parish. As its utility has been felt, particularly among the younger class of people, I think that if a similar plan were established in the different parishes of Scotland, it would tend greatly to the speedy improvement of the tenantry, trades-people, and work-people. Mr Burns was so good as to take the whole charge of this small concern. He was treasurer, librarian, and censor to this little society, who

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Mr John Ramsay (author of *Woodnotes of a Wanderer*), in *Ayr Advertiser*, January 9, 1851.

will long have a grateful sense of his public spirit and exertions for their improvement and information. I have the honour to be, Sir John, yours most sincerely,

ROBERT RIDDEL.

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TO SIR JOHN SINCLAIR.

[1791.]

SIR—The following circumstance has, I believe, been omitted in the statistical account transmitted to you of the parish of Dunscore, in Nithsdale. I beg leave to send it to you because it is new, and may be useful. How far it is deserving of a place in your patriotic publication you are the best judge.

To store the minds of the lower classes with useful knowledge is certainly of very great importance, both to them as individuals and to society at large. Giving them a turn for reading and reflection, is giving them a source of innocent and laudable amusement, and, besides, raises them to a more dignified degree in the scale of rationality. Impressed with this idea, a gentleman in this parish, Robert Riddel, Esq. of Glenriddel, set on foot a species of circulating library, on a plan so simple as to be practicable in any corner of the country; and so useful as to deserve the notice of every country gentleman who thinks the improvement of that part of his own species, whom chance has thrown into the humble walks of the peasant and the artisan, a matter worthy of his attention.

Mr Riddel got a number of his own tenants and farming neighbours to form themselves into a society for the purpose of having a library among themselves. They entered into a legal engagement to abide by it for three years; with a saving-clause or two, in case of removal to a distance or of death. Each member at his entry paid five shillings; and at each of their meetings, which were held every fourth Saturday, sixpence more. With their entry-money, and the credit which they took on the faith of their future funds, they laid in a tolerable stock of books at the commencement. What authors they were to purchase was always decided by the majority. At every meeting, all the books, under certain fines and forfeitures, by way of penalty, were to be produced; and the members had their choice of the volumes in rotation. He whose name stood for that night first on the list, had his choice of what volume he pleased in the whole collection; the second had his choice after the first; the third after the second; and so on to the last. At next meeting, he who had been first on the list at the preceding meeting was last at this; he who had been second was first; and so on through the whole three years. At the expiration of the engagement, the books were sold by auction, but only among the members themselves; and each man had his share of the common stock, in money or in books, as he chose to be a purchaser or not.

At the breaking up of this little society, which was formed under Mr Riddel's patronage, what with benefactions of books from him,

and what with their own purchases, they had collected together upwards of one hundred and fifty volumes. It will easily be guessed that a good deal of trash would be bought. Among the books, however, of this little library, were—*Blair's Sermons*, *Robertson's History of Scotland*, *Hume's History of the Stuarts*, *The Spectator*, *Idler*, *Adventurer*, *Mirror*, *Lounger*, *Observer*, *Man of Feeling*, *Man of the World*, *Chrysal*, *Don Quixote*, *Joseph Andrews*, &c. A peasant who can read, and enjoy such books, is certainly a much superior being to his neighbour who perhaps stalks beside his team, very little removed, except in shape, from the brutes he drives.

Wishing your patriotic exertions their so much merited success, I am, sir, your humble servant,  
A PEASANT.

TO MR. MAXWELL OF TEBBRAUGHTY, ON HIS BIRTHDAY.

Health to the Maxwell's veteran chief!  
Health, aye unsoured by care or grief:  
Inspired, I turned Fate's sybil leaf  
    This natal morn;  
I see thy life is stuff o' prief,  
    Scarce quite half worn.

This day thou metes threescore eleven,  
And I can tell that bounteous Heaven  
(The second-eight, ye ken, is given  
    To ilka Poet)  
On thee a tack o' seven times seven  
    Will yet bestow it.

If envious buckies view wi' sorrow  
Thy lengthened days on this blest morrow,  
May desolation's lang-teethed harrow,  
    Nine miles an hour,  
Rake them like Sodom and Gomorrah,  
    In brunstane stoure!

But for thy friends, and they are mony,  
Baith honest men and lassies bonnie,  
May couthie fortune, kind and cannie,  
    In social glee,  
Wi' mornings blithe, and e'enings funny,  
    Bless them and thee!

Fareweel, auld birkie! Lord be near ye,  
And then the deil he daurna steer ye:  
Your friends aye love, your faes aye fear ye;  
    For me, shame fa' me,  
If neist my heart I dinna wear ye  
    While BURNS they ca' me!

The person addressed in these verses—John Maxwell, Esq. of Terraughty and Munches—was a leading public man in the county of Dumfries. He was on several accounts very remarkable, but particularly for his birth and the proximity into which his family history brings us with events comparatively remote; for Mr Maxwell was grandson's-grandson, and no more, to the gallant and faithful Lord Herries, who on bended knees entreated Queen Mary to prosecute Bothwell as the murderer of her husband, and who subsequently fought for her at Langside. One cannot learn without a pleasing kind of surprise that a relation in the fifth degree of one who was *Warden of the West Marches* in 1545, should have lived to the close of the French Revolution wars, which was the case of Mr Maxwell, for he died in January 1814. Mr Maxwell was an active man both in the management of his own estate and in public business, and is admitted to have contributed greatly to the prosperity of his native district. A very curious paper drawn up by him in 1811, giving a view of the advance of the country in its agricultural economy during his centenarian existence, has been published.

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TO MRS DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 17th December 1791.

MANY thanks to you, madam, for your good news respecting the little floweret and the mother-plant. I hope my poetic prayers have been heard, and will be answered up to the warmest sincerity of their fullest extent; and then Mrs Henri will find her little darling the representative of his late parent, in everything but his abridged existence.

I have just finished the following song, which, to a lady, the descendant of Wallace, and many heroes of his truly illustrious line—and herself the mother of several soldiers—needs neither preface nor apology.

SONG OF DEATH.

AIR—*Owen an Aolp.*

*Scene*—A Field of Battle—Time of the day, Evening—The wounded and dying of the victorious army are supposed to join in the following song:—

Farewell, thou fair day, thou green earth, and ye skies,  
 Now gay with the bright setting sun;  
 Farewell loves and friendships, ye dear tender ties—  
 Our race of existence is run!

Thou grim King of Terrors, thou life's gloomy foe!  
 Go, frighten the coward and slave;  
 Go, teach them to tremble, fell tyrant! but know,  
 No terrors hast thou to the brave!

Thou strik'st the dull peasant—he sinks in the dark,  
 Nor saves e'en the wreck of a name;  
 Thou strik'st the young hero—a glorious mark!  
 He falls in the blaze of his fame!

In the field of proud honour—our swords in our hands,  
 Our king and our country to save—  
 While victory shines on life's last ebbing sands,  
 Oh! who would not die with the brave?

The circumstance that gave rise to the foregoing verses was—looking over with a musical friend M'Donald's collection of Highland airs, I was struck with one, an Isle of Skye tune, entitled *Oran an Aoig*, or *the Song of Death*, to the measure of which I have adapted my stanzas. I have of late composed two or three other little pieces, which, ere yon full-orbed moon, whose broad impudent face now stares at old Mother Earth all night, shall have shrunk into a modest crescent, just peeping forth at dewy dawn, I shall find an hour to transcribe for you. *A Dieu je vous commende.* R. B.

We have seen that so early as January 1790, after a little more than a year and a half's experience of his farm, the poet had become alarmed at its unprofitableness. His statement to Lady Elizabeth Cunningham in spring 1791 is, that but for the support he had from his Excise income he must have sunk under the bad bargain of his farm. It is difficult now to imagine such a farm as ruinous at £50 or even £70 a year, when the existing tenant pays £170, notwithstanding that it is now less by a few acres than in Burns's time, and that the markets are even lower than they were then. But some explanation is hinted when we hear Burns speaking of wandering out among the *broom* in his neighbourhood: the land was not then in its present state of cultivation; *high*, or even tolerable farming was not understood or practised; and, accordingly, it might be more difficult to wring £70 out of this farm for the landlord in 1791 than it is now to pay him £100 more. However this may be, Burns now only waited for a somewhat better appointment in the Excise to throw up his ungrateful acres.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In a conversation I had with Mr Kirkpatrick, the present tenant, in June 1850, he spoke of the farm as one which would be a pretty good bargain at £140, even under the new prospects of British agriculture. The land has been much improved since Burns's time, but still is not of first-rate quality.

His third versified epistle to Mr Graham, which is here placed in summer 1791, expresses, though hintingly, the eager wishes of the poet for such an appointment, and at length, by the kindness of that gentleman, it was obtained towards the close of the year. He had expected, as we have seen, a supervisorship; but this was to remain a hope deferred. The arrangement was that Burns should perform duty in Dumfries as an ordinary exciseman, and enjoy a salary of £70 per annum. This was an advance of £20 upon his Ellisland income, and as he did not now require to keep a horse, the advantage must be reckoned at a still higher sum. However this was, Burns considered himself as for the meantime independent of the farm. The income was indeed a small one, and it was something of a declension to be the common exciseman only; but hope at this time made up for all—he was led to expect an advance in the service which, though increasing his toils, would put him comparatively at ease in his circumstances. On this occasion he composed his

## FOURTH EPISTLE TO MR GRAHAM OF FINTRY.

I call no goddess to inspire my strains,  
A fabled muse may suit a bard that feigns;  
Friend of my life! my ardent spirit burns,  
And all the tribute of my heart returns,  
For boons accorded, goodness ever new,  
The gift still dearer, as the giver, you.

Thou orb of day! thou other paler light!  
And all ye many sparkling stars of night;  
If aught that giver from my mind efface,  
If I that giver's bounty e'er disgrace;  
Then roll to me, along your wandering spheres,  
Only to number out a villain's years!

As a first step, he had to get Ellisland taken off his hands by Mr Miller. It had pleased Heaven to bring these two remarkable men into a sort of friendship, but to 'decrease it upon better acquaintance.' Burns quickly found that Mr Miller's relation to him was that of the patron: he expected deference, and when Burns would not submit to such terms, the landlord and his gifted tenant became comparatively estranged. Yet there is no evidence of Mr Miller having ever acted otherwise than generously and leniently with Burns, or of Burns having ever acted ungratefully or with open disrespect towards Mr Miller. When the crisis arrived which caused the poet to wish to part with the farm, the landlord was fortunately in such circumstances as to render him



more than willing to take back the lease. A neighbour, Mr Morine, was willing to purchase for £2000 what Burns could not profitably lease at £70. Mr Miller was not unwilling to part on such terms with a piece of his property, which was awkwardly detached from the rest by the river. Accordingly, on the 19th November, Mr Morine became proprietor of 'the forty-shilling or three-merk land of old extent of Ellisland,' and Burns at the same time renounced his concern in the ground. He soon after sold off his stock and implements, and taking a small house in Dumfries, moved thither with his family and his furniture—'leaving nothing at Ellisland,' says Allan Cunningham, 'but a putting-stone with which he had loved to exercise his strength, a memory of his musings which can never die, and £300 of his money sunk beyond redemption in a speculation from which all had augured happiness.'

## DUMFRIES:

DECEMBER 1791—JULY 1796.

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It must have been a sad change to the poet and his family, when, leaving the beautiful knolls and haughs of Ellisland, and all the rough comforts of a farm, they had to take up their residence in the first floor of a small house in the 'Wee' Vennel of Dumfries, where the father no longer saw the sun rise over the beautiful river, the little ones had no longer the gowanéd sod to sport over, and the mother found that every article of household necessity had to be purchased. How light, however, would present inconveniences have appeared, if any of the group could have known that they had taken the first but decisive step towards the tragic conclusion which stretched this noble poet on his deathbed less than five years after!

Dumfries is a compact and rather elegant small town, situated on the Nith at the point where it becomes navigable. The environs are generally beautiful; one spot particularly so, where the ruins of Lincluden Church adorn the peninsula between the Nith and its tributary the Cluden. The curse of country towns is the partial and entire idleness of large classes of the inhabitants. There is always a cluster of men living on competencies, and a greater number of tradesmen whose shop-duties do not occupy half their time. Till a very recent period, dissipation in greater or less intensity was the rule and not the exception amongst these men; and in Dumfries, sixty years ago, this rule held good. In those days tavern enjoyments were in vogue among men who do not now enter a public place of entertainment once in a twelvemonth. The weary waste of spirits and energy at these soaking evening meetings was deplorable. Insipid toasts, petty raillery, empty gabble about trivial occurrences, endless disputes on small questions of fact, where an almanac or a dictionary would have settled all, these, relieved by a song when it was to be had,

formed the staple of convivial life as I remember it in such places in my own younger days. It was a life without progress, or profit, or any gleam of a tendency to moral elevation. The only redemption to be hoped for it was in such scintillations of wit and eloquence as a man like Burns could give. For him, on the other hand, to do so was to sacrifice the bread of angels before blocks and dolts.

Burns came into this society a comparatively pure man, for though the contrary has been asserted, there is no evidence that he had as yet acquired over-convivial habits. His own inclination was to shun rather than to court the bacchanalian revel, and there was a literal truth in what he told the Countess of Glencairn as to bringing his punch-bowl from its *dusty* corner on her ladyship's birthday. Burns, however, does not seem ever to have aimed at systematically resisting the temptations of convivial society. He yielded to them when they came, and it depended on the frequency of occasion or opportunity whether he was to be much or little in merry company. Now that he was thrown into Dumfries, it was of course to be feared that he would become much more a victim to such indulgences than formerly.

The removal to Dumfries was a crisis in the fate of Burns in another respect. In the earlier years of the French Revolution, it does not appear that our poet felt much interest in that agitating subject; nor do we observe any traces of political liberalism in his writings or conduct up to the latter part of 1791. In this respect he was not different from the great bulk of British society, for certainly till the publication of Burke's pamphlet the proceedings of the patriotic party in France had excited much less attention than might have been expected. There were as yet no democratic publications, no ultra-reforming societies. The active sympathisers were a small party of intelligent men, chiefly connected with the dissenting bodies. It was only now that the violent arrogations of the democratic party in the Legislative Assembly of France began to be viewed with any serious uneasiness by the English government. Men of rank and state could not but sympathise with the unfortunate Louis, whom his subjects kept in an honourable, but perilous captivity. Sober men began to fear that the new *régime* was not to settle to quiet or sober courses. On the other hand, the more ardent minds were loath to see danger. It is at this crisis that we find the mind of Burns beginning to kindle to French politics. Formerly ill affected, though in no serious way, to the Brunswick dynasty, it was with him, as with many other Jacobites, a simple change in the form of opposition to take up with the doctrines which were now a subject of alarm to the English and all other reigning families. Not that

he would have readily sanctioned any violent changes in the constitution of his country—such things were not generally thought of—but his sympathies were certainly with the patriots in France, as against their own sovereign and the powers proposing to replace him in full authority.

These are general observations which come in suitably at this place; but it is not immediately that their application appears.

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TO MR AINSLIE.

MY DEAR AINSLIE—Can you minister to a mind diseased?—can you, amid the horrors of penitence, regret, remorse, headache, nausea, and all the rest of the hounds of hell, that beset a poor wretch who has been guilty of the sin of drunkenness—can you speak peace to a troubled soul?

*Misérable perdu* that I am! I have tried everything that used to amuse me, but in vain: here must I sit, a monument of the vengeance laid up in store for the wicked, slowly counting every chick of the clock as it slowly, slowly numbers over these lazy scoundrels of hours, who, \* \* \* \*, are ranked up before me, every one following his neighbour, and every one with a burden of anguish on his back, to pour on my devoted head—and there is none to pity me. My wife scolds me, my business torments me, and my sins come staring me in the face, every one telling a more bitter tale than his fellow. \* \* \* I began *Elibanks and Elibraes*, but the stanzas fell unenjoyed and unfinished from my listless tongue: at last I luckily thought of reading over an old letter of yours that lay by me in my book-case, and I felt something, for the first time since I opened my eyes, of pleasurable existence—Well—I begin to breathe a little since I began to write to you. How are you, and what are you doing? How goes law? Apropos, for connexion's sake, do not address to me supervisor, for that is an honour I cannot pretend to: I am on the list, as we call it, for a supervisor, and will be called out by and by to act as one; but at present I am a simple gauger, though t'other day I got an appointment to an excise division of £25 per annum better than the rest. My present income, down money, is £70 per annum.

I have one or two good fellows here whom you would be glad to know.  
R. B.

We have but an obscure notice of a visit which Burns paid to Edinburgh in November of this year, being the last he ever made to that capital. Up to nearly this time Mrs M'Lehose had maintained the unforgiving distance which she assumed after his final union with Jean, notwithstanding his having sent her several

exculpatory letters. She had lately written to him in a style which drew forth the following reply:—

SYLVANDER TO CLARINDA.

I HAVE received both your last letters, madam, and ought, and would have answered the first long ago. But on what subject shall I write you? How can you expect a correspondent should write you when you declare that you mean to preserve his letters with a view, sooner or later, to expose them on the pillory of derision and the rack of criticism? This is gagging me completely as to speaking the sentiments of my bosom; else, madam, I could perhaps too truly

‘Join grief with grief, and echo sighs to thine!’

I have perused your most beautiful, but most pathetic poem; do not ask me how often or with what emotions. You know that ‘I dare to *sin*, but not to *lie*.’ Your verses wring the confession from my inmost soul, that—I will say it, expose it if you please—that I have, more than once in my life, been the victim of a damning conjuncture of circumstances; and that to me you must be ever

‘Dear as the light that visits those sad eyes.’

I have just, since I had yours, composed the following stanzas. Let me know your opinion of them:—

Sweet Sensibility, how charming,  
Thou, my friend, canst truly tell;  
But how Distress, with horrors arming,  
Thou, alas! hast known too well!

Fairest Flower, behold the lily,  
Blooming in the sunny ray;  
Let the blast sweep o’er the valley,  
See it prostrate on the clay.

Hear the wood-lark charm the forest,  
Telling o’er his little joys;  
But, alas! a prey the surest  
To each pirate of the skies.

Dearly bought the hidden treasure  
Finer feelings can bestow:  
Cords that vibrate sweetest pleasure  
Thrill the deepest notes of wo.

I have one other piece in your taste; but I have just a smatch of time.

Now, however, the lady was approaching a critical passage of her own history. She had resolved, though with much hesitation,

to accept an invitation from her heartless husband, and join him in Jamaica. In the softened feeling arising from the contemplation of such a movement, she relented so far towards Burns as to admit him to a visit. What one would give to know the particulars of the interview! It took place on the 6th of December. That it gave occasion to an effusion of passionate feeling is strongly hinted in a letter of the poet written a twelvemonth after. We may also hesitate little in reading as a record of the scene a series of lyrics, one of which is amongst the most earnest and arresting expressions of intense feeling ever composed in verse. He also addressed several letters to the lady.

## TO CLARINDA.

LEADHILLS, Thursday noon, [Dec. 11, 1791.]

[AFTER transcribing the *Lament of Mary Queen of Scots*, he adds]—Such, my dearest Clarinda, were the words of the amiable but unfortunate Mary. Misfortune seems to take a peculiar pleasure in darting her arrows against ‘honest men and bonny lasses.’ Of this you are too, too just a proof; but may your future fate be a bright exception to the remark. In the words of Hamlet—

‘Adieu, adieu, adieu! Remember me.’

SYLVANDER.

## TO CLARINDA.

DUMFRIES, [15th Dec. 1791.]

I HAVE some merit, my ever dearest of women, in attracting and securing the heart of Clarinda. In her I met with the most accomplished of all womankind, the first of all God’s works; and yet I, even I, had the good-fortune to appear amiable in her sight.

By the by, this is the sixth letter that I have written you since I left you; and if you were an ordinary being, as you are a creature very extraordinary—an instance of what God Almighty in the plenitude of his power and the fulness of his goodness can make!—I would never forgive you for not answering my letters.

I have sent your hair, a part of the parcel you gave me, with a measure, to Mr Bruce the jeweller in Princes Street, to get a ring done for me. I have likewise sent in the verses *On Sensibility*, altered to

‘Sensibility how charming,  
Dearest Nancy, thou canst tell,’ &c.

to the editor of the *Scots Songs*, of which you have three volumes, to set to a most beautiful air—out of compliment to the first of women, my ever-beloved, my ever-sacred Clarinda. I shall probably write you to-morrow. In the meantime, from a man who is literally drunk, accept and forgive!

R. B.

## TO CLARINDA.

DUMFRIES, 27th December 1791.

I HAVE yours, my ever-dearest madam, this moment. I have just ten minutes before the post goes, and these I shall employ in sending you some songs I have just been composing to different tunes for the *Collection of Songs*, of which you have three volumes, and of which you shall have the fourth.

## SONG.

*Tune—Bory Dalf's Port.*

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!  
Ae fareweel, and then for ever!  
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,  
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,  
While the star of hope she leaves him?  
Me, nae cheerful twinkle lights me;  
Dark despair around benights me.

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,  
Naething could resist my Nancy:  
But to see her was to love her;  
Love but her, and love for ever.

Had we never loved sae kindly,  
Had we never loved sae blindly!  
Never met—or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Fare-thee-weel, thou first and fairest!  
Fare-thee-weel, thou best and dearest!  
Thine be ilka joy and treasure,  
Peace, Enjoyment, Love, and Pleasure!

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!  
Ae fareweel, alas! for ever!  
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,  
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

## SONG.

*To an old Scots Tune.*

Behold the hour, the boat, arrive!  
My dearest Nancy, O fareweel!  
Severed frae thee, can I survive,  
Frae thee whom I have loved sae weel!

Endless and deep shall be my grief;  
 Nae ray o' comfort shall I see;  
 But this most precious, dear belief!  
 That thou wilt still remember me.

Alang the solitary shore,  
 Where fleeting sea-fowl round me cry,  
 Across the rolling, dashing roar,  
 I'll westward turn my wistful eye.

Happy, thou Indian grove, I'll say,  
 Where now my Nancy's path shall be!  
 While through your sweets she holds her way,  
 O tell me, does she muse on me!

## SONG.

*To a charming plaintive Scots Air.*

Ance mair I hail thee, thou gloomy December!  
 Ance mair I hail thee wi' sorrow and care:  
 Sad was the parting thou mak'st me remember,  
 Parting wi' Nancy, oh, ne'er to meet mair!

Fond lovers' parting is sweet, painful pleasure,  
 Hope beaming mild on the soft parting hour;  
 But the dire feeling, oh, farewell for ever!  
 Anguish unmingled and agony pure!

The rest of this song is on the wheels.

Adieu. Adieu.

SYLVANDER.

The poet afterwards added the following verses:—

Wild as the winter now tearing the forest,  
 Till the last leaf o' the summer is flown,  
 Such is the tempest has shaken my bosom,  
 Since my last hope and last comfort is gone!

Still as I hail thee, thou gloomy December,  
 Still shall I hail thee wi' sorrow and care;  
 For sad was the parting thou mak'st me remember,  
 Parting wi' Nancy, oh, ne'er to meet mair!

The song to the air *Rory Dall's Port* is the remarkable expression of passion above alluded to. The fourth stanza Byron put at the head of his poem, *The Bride of Abydos*. Scott has remarked that that verse is worth a thousand romances; and Mrs Jameson has elegantly said that not only are these lines what Scott says,



'but in themselves a complete romance. They are,' she adds, 'the alpha and omega of feeling, and contain the essence of an existence of pain and pleasure distilled into one burning drop.'

On the 25th of January 1792, Mrs M'Lehose wrote a friendly letter to Burns, bidding him farewell in anticipation of her immediate departure for Jamaica. She says: 'Seek God's favour, keep his commandments, be solicitous to prepare for a happy eternity. There I trust we will meet in never-ending bliss!' She sailed in February in that vessel, the *Roselle*, in which Burns intended to have left his country a few years before.

One of the final meetings of Burns and Clarinda is believed to be the subject-matter of the following song, which, however, must be regarded as a poetical rather than historical recital:—

#### O MAY, THY MORN.

O May, thy morn was ne'er so sweet  
As the mirk night o' December,  
For sparkling was the rosy wine,  
And secret was the chamber;  
And dear was she I darena name,  
But I will aye remember:  
And dear was she I darena name,  
But I will aye remember.

And here's to them that like oursel'  
Can push about the jorum;  
And here's to them that wish us weel,  
May a' that's gude watch o'er them!  
And here's to them we darena name,  
The dearest o' the quorum:  
And here's to them we darena tell,  
The dearest o' the quorum.

These lyrics could not have been written without an earnest, however temporary and transient feeling on the part of the author; yet we conceive it would be a great mistake to accept them as a literal expression of the particular passion in which they originated, or a description of incidents to which that passion gave rise. We ought to make a considerable allowance for the extent to which the poet's mind is actuated by mere considerations of art and the desire of effect. In one there is a levity, and in others a tincture of *metier*, which are alike incompatible with our notions of this sentimental attachment. The *À Fond Kiss* appears in a different light. The tragic tale seems there concentrated in a wild gush of eloquence direct from the poet's heart.

In the course of the ensuing summer, while Mrs M'Lehose was absent in the West Indies, the poet's feelings subsided into a comparative calm, and he then composed the following beautiful pastoral :—

## MY NANNIE'S AWA.

Now in her green mantle blithe nature arrays,  
And listens the lambkins that bleat o'er the braes,  
While birds warble welcome in ilka green shaw ;  
But to me it's delightless—my Nannie's awa.

The snawdrap and primrose our woodlands adorn,  
And violets bathe in the weat o' the morn ;  
They pain my sad bosom, sae sweetly they blaw,  
They mind me o' Nannie—and Nannie's awa.

Thou laverock that springs frae the dews of the lawn,  
The shepherd to warn o' the gray-breaking dawn ;  
And thou mellow mavis that hails the night fa',  
Give over fer pity—my Nannie's awa.

Come autumn, sae pensive, in yellow and gray,  
And soothe me with tidings o' nature's decay :  
The dark dreary winter and wild driving snaw  
Alane can delight me—now Nannie's awa !

Throwing himself sympathetically into the circumstances of the unhappy lady, he at the same time gave expression to her supposed feelings in seeking a reunion with her aberrant husband :—

## ● WANDERING WILLIE.

Here awa, there awa, wandering Willie,  
Now tired with wandering, haud awa hame ;  
Come to my bosom, my ae only dearie,  
And tell me thou bring'st me my Willie the same.

Loud blew the cauld winter winds at our parting ;  
It wasna the blast brought the tear in my ee :  
Now welcome the simmer, and welcome my Willie,  
The simmer to nature, my Willie to me.

Ye hurricanes, rest in the cave o' your slumbers !  
O how your wild horrors a lover alarms !  
Awaken ye breezes ! blow gently, ye billows !  
And waft my dear laddie ance mair to my arms.

III.

K

But if he's forgotten his faithfulest Nannie,  
 O still flow between us, thou wide-roaring main;  
 May I never see it, may I never trow it,  
 But, dying, believe that my Willie's my ain!<sup>1</sup>

It will be found that Burns afterwards made some alterations on the above song.

In a letter to Mr Cunningham, dated June 11, 1791, we have seen Burns expressing himself warmly in behalf of his friend Mr Clarke, the teacher at Moffat, whom he regarded as suffering an unworthy persecution. He appears in the interval to have been continuing to exert himself in behalf of Mr Clarke.

TO MR JAMES C[LARKE], MOFFAT.

DUMFRIES, 10th January 1792.

I received yours this moment, my dear sir. I sup with Captain Riddel in town to-night, else I had gone to Carse directly.<sup>2</sup> Courage, *mon ami!* The day may after all be yours; but at anyrate, there is other air to breathe than that of Moffat, pestiferously tainted as it is with the breath of that arch-scoundrel, J—. There are two quotations from two poets which, in situations such as yours, were congenial to my soul. Thomson says—

'What proves the hero truly great,  
 Is never, never to despair.'

And Dr Young—

——— 'On Reason build Resolve,  
 That column of true majesty in man.'

To-morrow you shall know the result of my consultation with Captain Riddel. Yours,

R. B.

In the more elevated society of Dumfries, into which Burns had, as usual, been invited, he found a young married lady of no common character. Maria Woodley was the daughter of a governor of Berbice, and had been married at a very early age to

<sup>1</sup> This song appears to have had a prototype in an old one of which two stanzas have been preserved:—

Here awa, there awa, here awa, Willie,  
 Here awa, there awa, here awa hame;  
 Lang have I sought thee, dear have I bought thee,  
 Now I hae gotten my Willie again.

Through the lang muir I have followed my Willie,  
 Through the lang muir I have followed him hame,  
 Whatever betide us nought shall divide us,  
 Love now rewards all my sorrow and pain.

<sup>2</sup> Doubtless to make interest for his friend on some point brought under his notice.

Mr Walter Riddel, a younger brother of Glenriddel, possessed of an estate in Antigua, but who had lately returned to his native country to enjoy the fruits of fortune. About four miles to the south of Dumfries stands a handsome mansion surrounded with a small estate; originally, under the name of the Holm, it was the rural retreat of the eminent advocate Andrew Crosbie, who has been generally reputed as the prototype of Counsellor Pleydell in *Guy Mannering*. Afterwards it was bought by a gentleman named Goldie, who called it Goldielea, after his own name and that of his wife—Leigh—a descendant of the elder branch of that distinguished English family. Mr Riddel, purchasing the place from Mr Goldie, named it Woodley Park, after the name of *his* wife; and so it continued to be called till, by the non-payment of the purchase-money, it reverted to Mr Goldie, and regained its former appellation of Goldielea, by which it is now recognised. The lady, who was as yet under twenty, though already a mother, possessed beauty, abilities, and accomplishments; was a little of an *esprit fort*; had a taste for literature and natural history; and delighted in the society of men of talent. The vivid genius of Burns instantly attracted her, and he became a frequent visitor at Woodley Park. There he found a fine library, comprising not only English literature, but choice examples of that of France and Italy, with which the fair proprietress was willing to make him acquainted. She was a writer of verses herself—at first sight an alarming fact for a literary visitor; but it happened that Mrs Riddel's poetry was far above mediocrity, and that she had too much good sense to allow it to become an annoyance to her friends. On the whole, then, Woodley Park was a most fascinating retreat for our susceptible bard. Nor does it appear that he was treated by either the lady or her husband in a patronising way, but, on the contrary, on a footing of equality, for the eldest son of the bard has a recollection of Mrs Riddel occasionally making friendly calls at his father's house in Dumfries.

Mrs Riddel had already a little literary scheme of her own in view, and wished to consult competent persons on the subject. It was not, however, of a poetical nature, and therefore she does not seem to have explained it to Burns. As it embraced, in an account of a voyage to Madeira and the Leeward Isles, some sketches of natural history, she seems to have thought that Burns's friend Smellie would be a good adviser respecting her scheme. She asked the poet for an introduction. The idea seems to have been startling to the bard. To present a beautiful, young, accomplished woman of fashion to the hirsute, rough-spoken old naturalist, who called him *Rabbie*, and perhaps never made a bow in his life to man or woman—how was it to be

accomplished ! The way in which Burns, after all, performed the duty, is very amusing :

TO MR WILLIAM SMELLIE, PRINTER.

DUMFRIES, 22d January 1792.

I SIT down, my dear sir, to introduce a young lady to you, and a lady in the first ranks of fashion too. What a task ! to you—who care no more for the herd of animals called young ladies, than you do for the herd of animals called young gentlemen. To you—who despise and detest the groupings and combinations of Fashion, as an idiot painter that seems industrious to place staring fools and unprincipled knaves in the foreground of his picture, while men of sense and honesty are too often thrown in the dimmest shades. Mrs Riddel, who will take this letter to town with her, and send it to you, is a character that, even in your own way, as a naturalist and a philosopher, would be an acquisition to your acquaintance. The lady, too, is a votary to the Muses ; and as I think myself somewhat of a judge in my own trade, I assure you that her verses, always correct, and often elegant, are much beyond the common run of the *lady-poetesses* of the day. She is a great admirer of your book ;<sup>1</sup> and hearing me say that I was acquainted with you, she begged to be known to you, as she is just going to pay her first visit to our Caledonian capital. I told her that her best way was to desire her near relation, and your intimate friend, Craigdarroch, to have you at his house while she was there ; and lest you might think of a lively West Indian girl of eighteen, as girls of eighteen too often deserve to be thought of, I should take care to remove that prejudice. To be impartial, however, in appreciating the lady's merits, she has one unlucky failing—a failing which you will easily discover, as she seems rather pleased with indulging in it—and a failing that you will easily pardon, as it is a sin which very much besets yourself—where she dislikes or despises, she is apt to make no more a secret of it than where she esteems and respects.

I will not present you with the unmeaning *compliments of the season*, but I will send you my warmest wishes and most ardent prayers, that FORTUNE may never throw your SUBSISTENCE to the mercy of a KNAVE, or set your CHARACTER on the judgment of a FOOL ; but that, upright and erect, you may walk to an honest grave, where men of letters shall say : ' Here lies a man who did honour to science,' and men of worth shall say : ' Here lies a man who did honour to human nature.'

R. B.

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TO MR PETER HILL.

DUMFRIES, 5th Feb. 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I send you by the bearer, Mr Clarke, a particular friend of mine, six pounds and a shilling, which you will dispose

<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophy of Natural History.*

of as follows:—five pounds ten shillings per account I owe Mr R. Burn, architect, for erecting the stone over the grave of poor Fergusson. He was two years in erecting it after I had commissioned him for it, and I have been two years in paying him, after he sent me his account; so he and I are quits. He had the *hardiesse* to ask me interest on the sum; but, considering that the money was due by one poet for putting a tombstone over another, he may, with grateful surprise, thank Heaven that he ever saw a farthing of it.

With the remainder of the money pay yourself for the *Office of a Messenger* that I bought of you; and send me by Mr Clarke a note of its price. Send me likewise the fifth volume of the *Observer* by Mr Clarke; and if any money remain, let it stand to account.

My best compliments to Mrs Hill.

I sent you a maukin [hare] by last week's fly, which I hope you received. Yours, most sincerely, R. B.

The account here spoken of has been preserved and copied. The following is a literal transcript:—

## MR ROBERT BURNS

To J. &amp; R. BURN.

June 23, 1789.

54 Feet Polished Craigleith Stone for a Headstone for Robert Fergusson, at 1s. . . . .	£2 14 0
10 Feet 8 inches dble Base Moulding, at 1s. 6d. . . . .	0 16 0
4 Large Iron Cramps, . . . . .	0 2 10
2 Stones to set the base on, at 1s. . . . .	0 2 0
320 Letters on do. at 8s. . . . .	1 5 8
Lead, and setting up Ditto, . . . . .	0 5 0
Gravediggers' dues, . . . . .	0 5 0

Mr Robert Burn, in the letter accompanying the account, addressed the poet with the familiarity of an acquaintance. After apologising for the delay that had taken place in erecting the stone, he facetiously says: 'I shall be happy to receive orders of a like nature for as many more of your friends that have gone hence as you please.'<sup>1</sup>

It was probably about this time that Burns inscribed the following lines in a copy of *The World*, from which they have been copied:—

Ill-fated genius! Heaven-taught Fergusson!  
 What heart that feels and will not yield a tear,  
 To think life's sun did set ere well begun  
 To shed its influence on thy bright career.  
 O why should truest worth and genius pine,  
 Beneath the iron grasp of Want and Wo,  
 While titled knaves and idiot greatness shine  
 In all the splendour Fortune can bestow!

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Nov. 1833.

TO MR JAMES C[LARKE], MOFFAT.

DUMFRIES, 17th Feb. 1792.

MY DEAR SIR—If this finds you at Moffat, or as soon as it finds you at Moffat, you must without delay wait on Mr Riddel, as he has been very kindly thinking of you in an affair that has occurred of a clerk's place in Manchester, which, if your hopes are desperate in your present business, he proposes procuring for you. I know your gratitude for past, as well as hopes of future favours will induce you to pay every attention to Glenriddel's wishes; as he is almost the only, and undoubtedly the best friend that your unlucky fate has left you.

Apropos, I just now hear that you have beat your foes, *every tail hollow*. Huzza! *To triumphe!* Mr Riddel, who is at my elbow, says that if it is so, he begs that you will wait on him directly, and I know you are too good a man not to pay your respects to your saviour. Yours, R. B.

A letter written at this time to William Nicol explains itself as drawn forth by an epistle of reproachful advice to the poet:

TO MR WILLIAM NICOL.

20th February 1792.

O THOU, wisest among the wise, meridian blaze of prudence, full-moon of discretion, and chief of many counsellors! How infinitely is thy puddle-headed, rattle-headed, wrong-headed, round-headed slave indebted to thy supereminent goodness, that from the luminous path of thy own right-lined rectitude, thou lookest benignly down on an erring wretch, of whom the zig-zag wanderings defy all the powers of calculation, from the simple copulation of units up to the hidden mysteries of fluxions! May one feeble ray of that light of wisdom which darts from thy sensorium, straight as the arrow of heaven, and bright as the meteor of inspiration, may it be my portion, so that I may be less unworthy of the face and favour of that father of proverbs and master of maxims, that antipode of folly and magnet among the sages—the wise and witty Willie Nicol! Amen! Amen! Yea, so be it!

For me! I am a beast, a reptile, and know nothing! From the cave of my ignorance, amid the fogs of my dulness, and pestilential fumes of my political heresies, I look up to thee, as doth a toad through the iron-barred lucerne of a pestiferous dungeon, to the cloudless glory of a summer sun! Sorely sighing in bitterness of soul, I say, when shall my name be the quotation of the wise, and my countenance be the delight of the godly, like the illustrious lord of Laggan's many hills! As for him, his works are perfect:

never did the pen of calumny blur the fair page of his reputation, nor the bolt of hatred fly at his dwelling.

Thou mirror of purity, when shall the elfin lamp of my glimmerous understanding, purged from sensual appetites and gross desires, shine like the constellation of thy intellectual powers! As for thee, thy thoughts are pure, and thy lips are holy. Never did the unhallowed breath of the powers of darkness and the pleasures of darkness pollute the sacred flame of thy sky-descended and heaven-bound desires; never did the vapours of impurity stain the unclouded serene of thy cerulean imagination. O that like thine were the tenor of my life, like thine the tenor of my conversation!—then should no friend fear for my strength, no enemy rejoice in my weakness! Then should I lie down and rise up, and none to make me afraid. May thy pity and thy prayer be exercised for, O thou lamp of wisdom and mirror of morality! thy devoted slave,

R. B.

A few days after the date of the last letter occurred one of the most remarkable events in the life of Burns. It may be related in the words of Mr Lockhart, who constructed this part of his work from original and authoritative documents:—

‘At that period [1792] a great deal of contraband traffic, chiefly from the Isle of Man, was going on along the coasts of Galloway and Ayrshire, and the whole of the revenue-officers from Gretna to Dumfries were placed under the orders of a superintendent residing in Annan, who exerted himself zealously in intercepting the descent of the smuggling vessels. On the 27th of February, a suspicious-looking brig was discovered in the Solway Firth, and Burns was one of the party whom the superintendent conducted to watch her motions. She got into shallow water the day afterwards, and the officers were enabled to discover that her crew were numerous, armed, and not likely to yield without a struggle. Lewars, a brother exciseman, an intimate friend of our poet, was accordingly sent to Dumfries for a guard of dragoons; the superintendent himself, Mr Crawford, proceeded on a similar errand to Ecclefechan, and Burns was left with some men under his orders, to watch the brig, and prevent landing or escape. From the private journal of one of the excisemen—now in my hands—it appears that Burns manifested considerable impatience while thus occupied, being left for many hours in a wet salt-marsh, with a force which he knew to be inadequate to the purpose it was meant to fulfil. One of his comrades hearing him abuse his friend Lewars in particular, for being slow about his journey, the man answered that he also wished the devil had him for his pains, and that Burns in the meantime would do well to indite a song upon the sluggard. Burns said nothing; but after taking a few strides



by himself among the reeds and shingle, rejoined his party, and chanted to them the well-known ditty—

THE DEIL'S AWA WI' THE EXCISEMAN.

[TUNE—*The Looking-glass.*

The deil cam fiddling through the town,  
And danced awa wi' the Exciseman,  
And ilka wife cries: 'Auld Mahoun,  
I wish you luck o' the prize man !'  
The deil's awa, the deil's awa,  
The deil's awa wi' the Exciseman ;'  
He's danced awa, he's danced awa,  
He's danced awa wi' the Exciseman !

We'll mak our maut, we'll brew our drink,  
We'll dance, and sing, and rejoice, man ;  
And mony brow thanks to the meikle black deil  
That danced awa wi' the Exciseman.  
The deil's awa, the deil's awa,  
The deil's awa wi' the Exciseman ;  
He's danced awa, he's danced awa,  
He's danced awa wi' the Exciseman !

There's threesome reels, there's foursome reels,  
There's hornpipes and strathspeys, man ;  
But the ae best dance e'er cam to the land  
Was—the deil's awa wi' the Exciseman.  
The deil's awa, the deil's awa,  
The deil's awa wi' the Exciseman ;  
He's danced awa, he's danced awa,  
He's danced awa wi' the Exciseman !]

'Lewars arrived shortly after with his dragoons; and Burns, putting himself at their head, waded sword in hand to the brig, and was the first to board her. The crew lost heart and submitted, though their numbers were greater than those of the assailing force. The vessel was condemned, and, with all her arms and stores, sold next day at Dumfries; upon which occasion Burns, whose conduct had been highly commended, thought fit to purchase four carronades by way of trophy.'

Mr Lockhart goes on to say that the poet sent these guns as a present 'to the French Convention,' with a letter testifying his admiration and respect, and that the gift and letter were intercepted at the custom-house at Dover.

The whole affair was treated by Allan Cunningham as of a fabulous character; but it has been substantiated in the main

particulars by Mr Joseph Train, the successor of Lewars as supervisor at Dumfries, from the original diary of Mr Crawford; an account of the seizure and sale of the vessel by Burns himself; and a document written by Lewars detailing the circumstance of Burns having purchased the four carronades, and despatched them as a present to the French Convention. In the sale-catalogue, in Burns's handwriting, which Mr Train possesses, the poet enters himself as the purchaser of the four guns for £3.<sup>1</sup>

Some doubt may nevertheless remain as to the gravity of Burns's fault in his disposal of the guns. Mr Lockhart says: 'We were not, it is true, at war with France; but every one knew and felt that we were to be so ere long; and nobody can pretend that Burns was not guilty on this occasion of a most absurd and presumptuous breach of decorum.'

With all proper deference, we do pretend at least to doubt, if not entirely to deny, that the act of Burns was necessarily to be held as a breach of decorum. A careful investigation of dates and attendant circumstances places the affair in a light very different from that in which it is represented by Mr Lockhart. At the time when Burns purchased the four carronades, there was no such body in existence as the French Convention. Such a body did come into being in the ensuing September; but if Burns delayed so long to send the guns, the fact should have been ascertained and distinctly stated, as a few months in a year distinguished by such a rapid course of events, and such extraordinary changes of public sentiment, make all possible difference in the character of the transaction. If, as is likely, Burns sent the guns to Paris immediately on their being bought (for what other purpose could he have made such a purchase?), he must have addressed them to the *Legislative Assembly*—a body which had as yet done nothing to forfeit the respect of worthy Englishmen, which was at this moment supporting a ministry of the Constitutional party around Louis XVI., and holding forth every demonstration of pacific feeling towards England. On the 28th of February 1792, it was less than a month from the time when George III. opened parliament with little besides congratulations on the peace and internal prosperity of the country. *The three per cents. were above ninety-six*, and expected to go up to par. Not a whisper had yet occurred of any proceedings of the British government with regard to the bad blood arising between France and the emperor of Germany. Not till August was the British ambassador recalled from Paris; not till the ensuing January was war proclaimed by England against France. Burns, in short, was entitled, at this

<sup>1</sup> See these documents more particularly alluded to in Blackie's edition of Burns, I. cccxlii.

particular moment, to make a friendly demonstration towards the French government, without necessarily being presumed to intend a breach of decorum towards his own. It is true we are told that the authorities at Dover intercepted the guns; but we do not know how long it was before they reached that place. In the state of conveyances at that time, it could not be a very short time. If they were not there before the end of April—war having then been proclaimed by the French against the emperor—the British government might feel warranted in stopping the guns, merely from a sense of the impropriety of sending even this small modicum of aid to a power which was arraying itself against one of our allies. Here it must not be supposed that we are unaware that the British court viewed the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly with dislike even so early as February. M. de Perigord—afterwards so well known as Talleyrand—having then come to sound the English ministry as to their sentiments on the possible attack of the French on the emperor's Flemish domains, found himself slighted at the levee, and was passed by the queen in the drawing-room without notice. But these were only premonitory symptoms of what was to follow. The essential fact of the case is, that the minutest daily chronicles of the time bear no trace of an apprehension on the part of the public that we were likely to become the enemies of France.<sup>1</sup> If Burns, then, despatched these guns soon after purchasing them, he may be said at the most to have committed, for a Scottish citizen and public officer, a somewhat eccentric action; but he cannot be accused of an 'absurd and presumptuous breach of decorum;' nor does it appear that his act was regarded in this light by any person entitled to take notice of his conduct.

One inference hitherto unnoted is to be made from his purchase of the four guns—that he possessed at this time a little spare money. Of this there are other symptoms, as his settling Hill's account for books in December, and his soon after discharging the debt for Fergusson's tombstone. He afterwards made an acknowledgment to his brother Gilbert, that he had incurred

<sup>1</sup> A few gleanings from the newspapers of the day will help us to set a right estimate on the act of Burns.

In the summer of 1791, a gentleman of Glasgow had communicated to Lafayette a plan for artillery carried by horses, and four guns so mounted were in consequence used by his troops with great effect at the battle of Maubeuge, June 9, 1792.

In the latter part of January 1792, a subscription was opened at Glasgow 'to aid the French in carrying on the war against the emigrant princes or any foreign power by whom they may be attacked.' In the words of the paragraph—'It is said that £1200 have already been subscribed.'

In May 15th, it is stated as a report that sixteen sail of the line are to be fitted out; 'but we do not believe it, as we hope our ministry are too prudent to think of involving this nation in any disputes that may arise from the French Revolution.'

some debts in consequence of carelessness about expense on his coming to reside in Dumfries. Thus we see that Burns, when he possessed any money over and above what was immediately required for subsistence, easily allowed it one way or another to slip through his hands. The small reversion of his farming scheme did not probably survive his arrival in Dumfries many months.

An interval of some months elapses, during which we have no letters of Burns, nor any trace of his actions. It seems, however, to have been a cheerful period of his life. He is first found writing in July, on a trivial piece of business, to an Edinburgh musical friend :—

TO MR SAMUEL CLARKE, EDINBURGH.

16th July 1792.

MR BURNS begs leave to present his most respectful compliments to Mr Clarke. Mr B. some time ago did himself the honour of writing Mr C. respecting coming out to the country, to give a little musical instruction in a highly respectable family, where Mr C. may have his own terms, and may be as happy as indolence, the devil, and the gout will permit him. Mr B. knows well how Mr C. is engaged with another family ; but cannot Mr C. find two or three weeks to spare to each of them ? Mr B. is deeply impressed with, and awfully conscious of, the high importance of Mr C.'s time, whether in the winged moments of symphonious exhibition, at the keys of harmony, while listening seraphs cease their own less delightful strains ; or in the drowsy arms of slumberous repose, in the arms of his dearly-beloved elbow-chair, where the frowsy but potent power of indolence circumscribes her vapours round, and sheds her dews on the head of her darling son. But half a line conveying half a meaning from Mr C. would make Mr B. the happiest of mortals.

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TO MRS DUNLOP.

ANNAN WATER-FOOT, 22d August 1792.

Do not blame me for it, madam—my own conscience, hackneyed and weather-beaten as it is, in watching and reproving my vagaries, follies, indolence, &c. has continued to punish me sufficiently.

Do you think it possible, my dear and honoured friend, that I could be so lost to gratitude for many favours, to esteem for much worth, and to the honest, kind, pleasurable tie of, now old acquaintance, and I hope and am sure of progressive, increasing friendship—as for a single day, not to think of you—to ask the Fates what they are doing and about to do with my much-loved friend and her wide-

scattered connections, and to beg of them to be as kind to you and yours as they possibly can !

Apropos !—though how it is apropos I have not leisure to explain—do you know that I am almost in love with an acquaintance of yours ! Almost ! said I—I am in love, souce over head and ears, deep as the most unfathomable abyss of the boundless ocean !—but the word love, owing to the *intermingledoms* of the good and the bad, the pure and the impure, in this world, being rather an equivocal term for expressing one's sentiments and sensations, I must do justice to the sacred purity of my attachment. Know then, that the heart-struck awe ; the distant humble approach ; the delight we should have in gazing upon and listening to a messenger of Heaven, appearing in all the unspotted purity of his celestial home, among the coarse, polluted, far inferior sons of men, to deliver to them tidings that make their hearts swim in joy, and their imaginations soar in transport—such, so delighting and so pure, were the emotions of my soul on meeting the other day with Miss Lesley Baillie, your neighbour at M[ayfield]. Mr B. with his two daughters, accompanied by Mr H. of G., passing through Dumfries a few days ago, on their way to England, did me the honour of calling on me ; on which I took my horse—though, God knows, I could ill spare the time—and accompanied them fourteen or fifteen miles, and dined and spent the day with them. 'Twas about nine, I think, when I left them, and riding home, I composed the following ballad, of which you will probably think you have a dear bargain, as it will cost you another groat of postage. You must know that there is an old ballad beginning with—

' My bonnie Lizzie Baillie,  
I'll rowe thee in my plaidie,' &c.

So I parodied it as follows, which is literally the first copy, 'un-anointed, unannealed,' as Hamlet says :—

#### BONNIE LESLEY.

O saw ye bonnie Lesley,  
As she gaed ower the Border !  
She's gane, like Alexander,  
To spread her conquests farther.

To see her is to love her,  
And love but her for ever ;  
For nature made her what she is,  
And never made anither !

Thou art a queen, fair Lesley,  
Thy subjects we, before thee ;  
Thou art divine, fair Lesley,  
The hearts o' men adore thee.

The deil he couldna scaith thee,  
Or aught that wad belang thee;  
He'd look into thy bonnie face,  
And say, 'I canna wrang thee!'

The powers aboon will tent thee;  
Misfortune sha' na steer thee;  
Thou'rt like themselves sae lovely,  
That ill they'll ne'er let near thee.

Return again, fair Lesley,  
Return to Caledonie!  
That we may brag, we hae a lass  
There's nane again sae bonnie.<sup>1</sup>

So much for ballads. I regret that you are gone to the east country, as I am to be in Ayrshire in about a fortnight. This world of ours, notwithstanding it has many good things in it, yet it has ever had this curse—that two or three people, who would be the happier the oftener they met together, are, almost without exception, always so placed as never to meet but once or twice a year, which, considering the few years of a man's life, is a very great 'evil under the sun,' which I do not recollect that Solomon has mentioned in his catalogue of the miseries of man.<sup>2</sup> I hope and believe that there is a state of existence beyond the grave where the worthy of this life will renew their former intimacies, with this endearing addition—that 'we meet to part no more.'

'Tell us, ye dead,  
Will none of you in pity disclose the secret,  
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be?'

A thousand times have I made this apostrophe to the departed sons of men, but not one of them has ever thought fit to answer the question. 'O that some courteous ghost would blab it out!' But it cannot be: you and I, my friend, must make the experiment by ourselves and for ourselves. However, I am so convinced that an unshaken faith in the doctrines of religion is not only necessary, by making us better men, but also by making us happier men, that I should take every care that your little godson, and every little creature that shall call me father, shall be taught them.

So ends this heterogeneous letter, written at this wild place of the world, in the intervals of my labour of discharging a vessel of rum from Antigua.

R. B.

<sup>1</sup> Miss Lesley Baillie became Mrs Cumming of Logie, and died at Edinburgh, July 1843.

<sup>2</sup> Blair's *Grave*.

TO MR CUNNINGHAM.

DUMFRIES, 10th September 1792.

No! I will not attempt an apology. Amid all my hurry of business, grinding the faces of the publican and the sinner on the merciless wheels of the Excise; making ballads, and then drinking and singing them; and, over and above all, the correcting the press-work of two different publications;<sup>1</sup> still, still I might have stolen five minutes to dedicate to one of the first of my friends and fellow-creatures. I might have done, as I do at present, snatched an hour near 'witching-time of night,' and scrawled a page or two. I might have congratulated my friend on his marriage;<sup>2</sup> or I might have thanked the Caledonian archers for the honour they have done me<sup>3</sup> (though, to do myself justice, I intended to have done both in rhyme, else I had done both long ere now.) Well, then, here is to your good health!—for you must know, I have set a nipperkin of toddy by me, just by way of spell, to keep away the meikle horned-dell or any of his subaltern imps, who may be on their nightly rounds.

But what shall I write to you?—'The voice said, Cry;' and I said, 'What shall I cry?' O thou spirit! whatever thou art, or wherever thou makest thyself visible! Be thou a bogle by the eerie side of an auld thorn, in the dreary glen through which the herd-callan maun bicker in his gloamin route frae the fauld! Be thou a brownie, set, at dead of night, to thy task by the blazing ingle, or in the solitary barn, where the repercussions of thy iron flail half affright thyself, as thou performest the work of twenty of the sons of men, ere the cock-crowing summon thee to thy ample cog of substantial brose. Be thou a kelpie, haunting the ford or ferry in the starless night, mixing thy laughing yell with the howling of the storm and the roaring of the flood, as thou viewest the perils and miseries of man on the foundering horse, or in the tumbling boat! Or, lastly, be thou a ghost, paying thy nocturnal visits to the hoary ruins of decayed grandeur; or performing thy mystic rites in the shadow of the time-worn church, while the moon looks without a cloud on the silent, ghastly dwellings of the dead around thee; or taking thy stand by the bedside of the villain, or the murderer, portraying on his dreaming fancy, pictures dreadful as the horrors of unveiled hell, and terrible as the wrath of incensed Deity! Come, thou spirit, but not in these horrid forms; come with the milder, gentle, easy inspirations which thou breathest round the wig of a prating

<sup>1</sup> Mr Cæech to Mr Cadell, June 13, 1792: 'I enclose a sheet of Burns's Poems, now going on, that you may have the plate in readiness. There will be fifty pages of additional poems to this edition.'

The other work now in the course of being corrected by Burns as it passed through the press was probably *Johnson's Musical Museum*.

<sup>2</sup> [Married] at Edinburgh (April 13, 1792). Mr Alexander Cunningham, writer, to Miss Agnes Moir, youngest daughter of the late Rev. Henry Moir, minister of the gospel at Auchtertool.—*Scots Magazine*.

<sup>3</sup> The diploma sent by this honourable body to the poet is in possession of his son, Major J. G. Burns.

advocate, or the *titte-d-titte* of a tea-sipping gossip, while their tongues run at the light-horse gallop of clish-maclaver for ever and ever—come and assist a poor devil who is quite jaded in the attempt to share half an idea among half a hundred words; to fill up four quarto pages, while he has not got one single sentence of recollection, information, or remark, worth putting pen to paper for. \* \* \* \*

Apropos, how do you like—I mean *really* like—the married life! Ah, my friend! matrimony is quite a different thing from what your love-sick youths and sighing girls take it to be! But marriage, we are told, is appointed by God, and I shall never quarrel with any of his institutions. I am a husband of older standing than you, and shall give you *my* ideas of the conjugal state (*en passant*; you know I am no Latinist; is not *conjugal* derived from *jugum*, a yoke?) Well, then, the scale of good wifeship I divide into ten parts: Good-nature, four; Good Sense, two; Wit, one; Personal Charms—namely, a sweet face, eloquent eyes, fine limbs, graceful carriage (I would add a fine waist too, but that is soon spoilt, you know), all these, one; as for the other qualities belonging to or attending on a wife, such as Fortune, Connections, Education (I mean education extraordinary), family blood, &c. divide the two remaining degrees among them as you please; only, remember that all these minor properties must be expressed by *fractions*, for there is not any one of them, in the aforesaid scale, entitled to the dignity of an *integer*.

As for the rest of my fancies and reveries—how I lately met with Miss Lesley Baillie, the most beautiful, elegant woman in the world—how I accompanied her and her father's family fifteen miles on their journey out of pure devotion, to admire the loveliness of the works of God, in such an unequalled display of them—how, in galloping home at night, I made a ballad on her, of which these two stanzas make a part—

‘Thou, bonnie Lesley, art a queen,  
Thy subjects we before thee;  
Thou, bonnie Lesley, art divine,  
The hearts o’ men adore thee.

The very deil he couldna scathe  
Whatever wad belang thee!  
He’d look into thy bonnie face,  
And say, “I canna wrang thee.”’

Behold all these things are written in the chronicles of my imagination, and shall be read by thee, my dear friend, and by thy beloved spouse, my other dear friend, at a more convenient season.

Now, to thee, and to thy before-designed *bosom*-companion, be given the precious things brought forth by the sun, and the precious things brought forth by the moon, and the benignant influences of the stars, and the living streams which flow from the fountains of life, and by the tree of life, for ever and ever! Amen! R. B.



The *Scots Musical Museum* of Johnson was originally an engraver's undertaking. The assistance of Burns unexpectedly made it an ample repertory of the Scottish music and songs, besides giving it the attractions of his own brilliant muse. It had also the benefit of the co-operation of Mr Samuel Clarke, the organist, in harmonising the airs. It was, however, a work of plain appearance, and scarcely suitable in purity of taste for refined society.

About the time at which we have now arrived, a small fraternity of musical amateurs in Edinburgh had matured the design of a collection of the Scottish airs with poetry, in a much more elegant form, under more rigid editorial care, and with the novel advantage of symphonies and accompaniments by the first musicians of the continent. The person chiefly concerned was Mr George Thomson, a man somewhat above Burns's own age, occupying the situation of clerk in the office of the Board of Trustees for the Encouragement of Manufactures in Scotland. Another was the Honourable Andrew Erskine, brother of the musical Earl of Kellie,<sup>1</sup> a wit and versifier well known in aristocratic circles. The former gentleman lived till February 1851 in the possession of all his faculties, not less in the enjoyment of his favourite music, and of all the rational pleasures of society—a remarkable proof of what a moderate, cheerful mind, not unduly tasked by business or crushed by care, will do in prolonging life, and thus forming a striking contrast to the hapless bard of Caledonia. It was determined by the little group of amateurs that the assistance of Burns should be asked, and Mr Thomson accordingly addressed him.


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#### MR THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, September 1792.

SIR—For some years past I have, with a friend or two, employed many leisure hours in selecting and collating the most favourite of our national melodies for publication. We have engaged Pleyel, the most agreeable composer living, to put accompaniments to these, and also to compose an instrumental prelude and conclusion to each air, the better to fit them for concerts, both public and private. To render this work perfect, we are desirous to have the poetry improved wherever it seems unworthy of the music; and that it is so in many instances is allowed by every one conversant with our

<sup>1</sup> Third son of Alexander, fifth Earl of Kellie, by Janet, daughter of the celebrated physician and wit, Dr Pitcairn. Mr Erskine was the author in part of a curious and rare volume entitled *Letters between the Hon. Andrew Erskine and James Boswell, Esq.* London, 1763—an amusing specimen of youthful frolic and vivacity.

musical collections. The editors of these seem in general to have depended on the music proving an excuse for the verses; and hence some charming melodies are united to mere nonsense and doggrel, while others are accommodated with rhymes so loose and indelicate as cannot be sung in decent company. To remove this reproach would be an  task to the author of the *Cotter's Saturday Night*; and, for the honour of Caledonia, I would fain hope he may be induced to take up the pen. If so, we shall be enabled to present the public with a collection infinitely more interesting than any that has yet appeared, and acceptable to all persons of taste, whether they wish for correct melodies, delicate accompaniments, or characteristic verses. We will esteem your poetical assistance a particular favour, besides paying any reasonable price you shall please to demand for it. Profit is quite a secondary consideration with us, and we are resolved to spare neither pains nor expense on the publication. Tell me frankly, then, whether you will devote your leisure to writing twenty or twenty-five songs suited to the particular melodies which I am prepared to send you. A few songs, exceptionable only in some of their verses, I will likewise submit to your consideration, leaving it to you either to mend these or make new songs in their stead. It is superfluous to assure you that I have no intention to displace any of the sterling old songs; those only will be removed which appear quite silly or absolutely indecent. Even these shall be all examined by Mr Burns, and if he is of opinion that any of them are deserving of the music, in such cases no divorce shall take place.

G. THOMSON.

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BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

DUMFRIES, 16th Sept. 1792.

SIR—I have just this moment got your letter. As the request you make to me will positively add to my enjoyments in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have, strained to their utmost exertion by the impulse of enthusiasm. Only, don't hurry me—'Deil tak the hindmost' is by no means the *cri de guerre* of my Muse. Will you, as I am inferior to none of you in enthusiastic attachment to the poetry and music of old Caledonia, and, since you request it, have cheerfully promised my mite of assistance—will you let me have a list of your airs with the first line of the printed verses you intend for them, that I may have an opportunity of suggesting any alteration that may occur to me? You know 'tis in the way of my trade; still leaving you, gentlemen, the undoubted right of publishers to approve or reject, at your pleasure, for your own publication. Apropos, if you are for English verses, there is, on my part, an end of the matter. Whether in the simplicity of the ballad, or the pathos of the song, I can only hope to please myself in being allowed at least a sprinkling of our native tongue

English verses, particularly the works of Scotsmen that have merit, are certainly very eligible. *Tweedside! Ah! the poor shepherd's mournful fate! Ah! Chloris, could I now but sit!*<sup>1</sup> &c. you cannot mend; but such insipid stuff as *To Fanny fair could I impart*, &c. usually set to *The Mill, Mill, O!* is a disgrace to the collections in which it has already appeared, and would doubly disgrace a collection that will have the very superior merit of yours. But more of this in the further prosecution of the business, if I am called on for my strictures and amendments—I say amendments, for I will not alter except where I myself, at least, think that I amend.

As to any remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c. would be downright prostitution of soul!<sup>2</sup> A proof of each of the songs that I compose or amend I shall receive as a favour. In the rustic phrase of the season, 'Gude speed the wark!' I am, sir, your very humble servant,

R. BURNS.

In August, Johnson published the fourth volume of his *Scotts Musical Museum*, containing a number of songs by Burns, either wholly original, or improvements upon rude ditties of the olden time. Such as have not already been inserted in connection with particular dates and circumstances are here presented:

#### CRAIGIEBURN WOOD.

Sweet closes the eve on Craigieburn Wood,  
And blithely awaukens the morrow;  
But the pride of the spring in the Craigieburn Wood  
Can yield me nothing but sorrow.

Beyond thee, dearie, beyond thee, dearie,  
And oh, to be lying beyond thee!  
O sweetly, soundly, weel may he sleep  
That's laid in the bed beyond thee.

I see the spreading leaves and flowers,  
I hear the wild birds singing;  
But pleasure they hae nane for me,  
While care my heart is wringing.

I canna tell, I maunna tell,  
I darena for your anger;  
But secret love will break my heart,  
If I conceal it langer.

<sup>1</sup> In manuscript a clause here erased by Burns: 'except, excuse my vanity, you should for *Gilderoy* prefer my own song. "From thee, *Eliza*, I must go."'

<sup>2</sup> This expression was altered by Currie. In the original manuscript, a stronger term was employed.

I see thee gracefu', straight, and tall,  
 I see thee sweet and bonnie ;  
 But oh, what will my torments be,  
 If thou refuse thy Johnnie !

To see thee in another's arms,  
 In love to lie and languish,  
 'Twad be my dead, that will be seen,  
 My heart wad burst wi' anguish.

death

But, Jeanie, say thou wilt be mine,  
 Say thou loes nane before me ;  
 And a' my days o' life to come  
 I'll gratefully adore thee.

[The above, he himself tells us, was composed as a representation of the passion which a Mr Gillespie, a particular friend of his, had for a young lady named Lorimer, who had been born at Craigieburn Wood, a beautiful place near Moffat. The names of Gillespie and Lorimer are still to be seen inscribed on a pane in the poet's parlour window at Ellisland. As Miss Lorimer was born in 1775, she must have been only sixteen at most when wooed vicariously in these impassioned stanzas. It was not her destiny to become Mrs Gillespie; but it was reserved for her to be the subject of many other lays by Burns, as will be learned more particularly from a subsequent part of these memoirs. Burns afterwards altered and reduced the song of *Craigieburn Wood* into the following more correct, but also tamer form :—

Sweet fa's the eve on Craigieburn,  
 And blithe awakes the morrow ;  
 But a' the pride o' spring's return  
 Can yield me nocht but sorrow.

I see the flowers and spreading trees,  
 I hear the wild birds singing ;  
 But what a weary wight can please,  
 And care his bosom wringing !

Fain, fain would I my griefs impart,  
 Yet darena for your anger ;  
 But secret love will break my heart  
 If I conceal it langer.

If thou refuse to pity me,  
 If thou shalt love anither,  
 When yon green leaves fade frae the tree,  
 Around my grave they'll wither.

## FRAE THE FRIENDS AND LAND I LOVE.

AIR—*Carron Side.*

Frae the friends and land I love  
 Driven by fortune's felly spite,  
 Frae my best beloved I rove,  
 Never mair to taste delight;  
 Never mair maun hope to find  
 Ease frae toil, relief frae care:  
 When remembrance wracks the mind,  
 Pleasures but unveil despair.

Brightest climes shall mirk appear,  
 Desert ilka blooming shore,  
 Till the Fates nae mair severe,  
 Friendship, love, and peace restore;  
 Till Revenge, wi' laurelled head,  
 Bring our banished hame again;  
 And ilk loyal bonnie lad  
 Cross the seas and win his ain.

[‘ Burns says of this song: “ I added the last four lines by way of giving a turn to the theme of the poem, such as it is.” The whole song, however, is in his own handwriting, and I have reason to believe it is all his own.’—*Stanhouse.*]

## MEIKLE THINKS MY LOVE.

TUNE—*My Tocher's the Jewel.*

O meikle thinks my luve o' my beauty,  
 And meikle thinks my luve o' my kin;  
 But little thinks my luve I ken brawlie  
 My tocher's the jewel has charms for him.  
 It's a' for the apple he'll nourish the tree;  
 It's a' for the honey he'll cherish the bee;  
 My laddie's sae meikle in luve wi' the siller,  
 He canna hae luve to spare for me.

Your proffer o' luve's an arle-penny,  
 My tocher's the bargain ye wad buy;  
 But an ye be crafty, I am cunnin',  
 Sae ye wi' another your fortune maun try.  
 Ye're like to the timmer o' yon rotten wood,  
 Ye're like to the bark o' yon rotten tree,  
 Ye'll slip frae me like a knotless thread,  
 And ye'll crack your credit wi' mae nor me.

[Although this song appears in the *Museum* with the name of Burns, Mrs Begg affirms that it is in reality only an improvement by her brother upon an old song.]

## WHAT CAN A YOUNG LASSIE!

TUNE—*What can a Young Lassie do wi' an Auld Man?*

What can a young lassie, what shall a young lassie,  
 What can a young lassie do wi' an auld man!  
 Bad luck on the penny that tempted my minnie  
 To sell her poor Jenny for siller and lan'!

He's always compleenin' frae mornin' to e'enin',  
 He hoasts and he hirples the weary day lang;  
 He's doyl't and he's dozin', his bluid it is frozen,  
 O dreary's the night wi' a crazy auld man!

coughs

He hums and he hankers, he frets and he cankers,  
 I never can please him, do a' that I can;  
 He's peevish and jealous of a' the young fellows:  
 O dool on the day I met wi' an auld man!

My auld auntie Katie upon me takes pity,  
 I'll do my endeavour to follow her plan;  
 I'll cross him, and wrack him, until I heart-break him,  
 And then his auld brass will buy me a new pan.

## HOW CAN I BE BLITHE AND GLAD!

TUNE—*The Bonnie Lad that's far awa.*

O how can I be blithe and glad,  
 Or how can I gang brisk and braw,  
 When the bonnie lad that I loe best  
 Is ower the hills and far awa!

It's no the frosty winter wind,  
 It's no the driving drift and snaw;  
 But aye the tear comes in my ee,  
 To think on him that's far awa.

My father pat me frae his door,  
 My friends they hae disowned me a';  
 But I hae ane will tak my part,  
 The bonnie lad that's far awa.

A pair o' gloves he bought to me,  
 And silken snoods he gae me twa;  
 And I will wear them for his sake,  
 The bonnie lad that's far awa.

[‘He took the first line, and even some hints of his verses, from an old song in Herd’s collection, which begins, *How can I be blithe or glad, or in my mind contented be?*’—*Stanhouse.*]

## I DO CONFESS THOU ART SAE FAIR.

I do confess thou art sae fair,  
 I wad been ower the lugs in love,  
 Had I na found the slightest prayer  
 That lips could speak thy heart could move.  
 I do confess thee sweet, but find  
 Thou art sae thriftless o' thy sweets,  
 Thy favours are the silly wind,  
 That kisses ilka thing it meets.  
 See yonder rose-bud, rich in dew,  
 Amang its native briers sae coy;  
 How sune it tines its scent and hue  
 When poued and worn a common toy!  
 Sic fate, ere lang, shall thee betide,  
 Though thou may gaily bloom awhile;  
 Yet sune thou shalt be thrown aside  
 Like ony common weed and vile.

[Altered into the Scotch language by Burns from an English poem by Sir Robert Ayton, private secretary to Anne, consort of James VI. Sir Robert's verses are as follow:—

I do confess thou 'rt sweet; yet find  
 Thee such an unthrif of thy sweets,  
 Thy favours are but like the wind,  
 That kiseth every thing it meets;  
 And since thou canst with more than one,  
 Thou 'rt worthy to be kissed by none.  
 The morning rose that untouched stands,  
 Armed with her briers, how sweetly smells!  
 But plucked and strained through ruder hands,  
 Her scent no longer with her dwells.  
 But scent and beauty both are gone,  
 And leaves fall from her one by one.  
 Such fate, ere long, will thee betide,  
 When thou hast handled been awhile;  
 Like sun-flowers to be thrown aside,  
 And I shall sigh while some will smile:  
 So see thy love for more than one,  
 Has brought thee to be loved by none.]

## YON WILD MOSSY MOUNTAINS.

TUNE—*Yon wild Mossy Mountains.*

['This tune is by Oswald: the song alludes to a part of my private history which it is of no consequence to the world to know.'—BURNS.]

Yon wild mossy mountains sae lofty and wide,  
 That nurse in their bosom the youth o' the Clyde,  
 Where the grouse lead their coveys through the heather to feed,  
 And the shepherd tents his flock as he pipes on his reed.

Not Gowrie's rich valleys, nor Forth's sunny shores,  
To me hae the charms o' yon wild mossy moors;  
For there, by a lanely and sequestered stream,  
Resides a sweet lassie, my thought and my dream.

Amang thae wild mountains shall still be my path,  
Ilk stream foaming down its ain green, narrow strath;  
For there, wi' my lassie, the day lang I rove,  
While o'er us unheeded flee the swift hours o' love.

She is not the fairest, although she is fair;  
O' nice education but sma' is her share;  
Her parentage humble as humble can be;  
But I loe the dear lassie because she loes me.

To beauty what man but maun yield him a prize,  
In her armour of glances, and blushes, and sighs!  
And when wit and refinement hae polished her darts,  
They dazzle our een, as they flee to our hearts.

But kindness, sweet kindness, in the fond sparkling ee,  
Has lustre outshining the diamond to me;  
And the heart beating love as I'm clasped in her arms,  
Oh, these are my lassie's all-conquering charms!

---

O FOR ANE-AND-TWENTY, TAM.

TUNE—*The Mouldiecoot.*

[ 'The subject of this song had a real origin: a young girl having been left some property by a near relation, and at her own disposal on her attaining majority, was pressed by her relations to marry an old rich booby. Her affections, however, had previously been engaged by a young man, to whom she had pledged her troth when she should become of age, and she of course obstinately rejected the solicitations of her friends to any other match. Burns represents the lady addressing her youthful lover in the language of constancy and affection.'—*Stenhouse.* ]

CHORUS.

And O for ane-and-twenty, Tam,  
And hey, sweet ane-and-twenty, Tam,  
I'll learn my kin a rattlin' sang,  
An I saw ane-and-twenty, Tam.

They snool me sair, and haud me down,  
And gar me look like bluntie, Tam!  
But three short years will soon wheel roun'—  
And then comes ane-and-twenty, Tam.

snud  
a sniveller



A gleib o' lan', a clant o' gear,	lump
Was left me by my auntie, Tam ;	
At kith or kin I needna spier,	ask
An I saw ane-and-twenty, Tam.	

They'll hae me wed a wealthy coof,	fool
Though I mysel' hae plenty, Tam ;	
But hear'at thou, laddie—there's my loof—	palm
I'm thine at ane-and-twenty, Tam.	

## BESS AND HER SPINNING-WHEEL.

*TUNE—The Sweet Lass that loes me.*

O leeze me on my spinning-wheel,	
O leeze me on my rock and reel ;	
Fræ tap to tae that cleeds me bien,	comfortably
And haps me fiel and warm at e'en !	wraps clean
I'll set me down and sing and spin,	
While laigh descends the simmer sun,	low
Blest wi' content, and milk and meal—	
O leeze me on my spinning-wheel !	

On ilka hand the burnies trot,	
And meet below my theekit cot ;	
The scented birk and hawthorn white,	
Across the pool their arms unite,	
Alike to screen the birdie's nest,	
And little fishes' caller rest :	cool
The sun blinks kindly in the biel',	shed
Where blithe I turn my spinning-wheel.	

On lofty aiks the cushats wail,	wood-pigeons
And echo cons the doolfu' tale ;	
The lintwhites in the hazel braces,	linnets
Delighted, rival ither's lays :	
The craik amang the clover hay,	land-rail
The patrick whirrin' o'er the ley,	
The swallow jinkin' round my shiel,	
Amuse me at my spinning-wheel.	

Wi' sma' to sell, and less to buy,  
 Aboon distress, below envy,  
 O wha wad leave this humble state,  
 For a' the pride of a' the great !  
 Amid their flaring, idle toys,  
 Amid their cumbrous, dingsome joys,  
 Can they the peace and pleasure feel  
 Of Bessy at her spinning-wheel !

## NITHSDALE'S WELCOME HOME.

[Written when Lady Winifred Maxwell, the descendant of the forfeited Earl of Nithsdale, returned to Scotland and rebuilt Terregles House, in the stewardry of Kirkcudbright. Captain Riddel of Glenriddel furnished the air to which Burns composed the verses.]

The noble Maxwells and their powers  
Are coming o'er the Border,  
And they'll gas bigg Terregles towers,  
And set them a' in order.  
And they declare Terregles fair,  
For their abode they choose it;  
There's no a heart in a' the land  
But's lighter at the news o't.

Though stars in skies may disappear,  
And angry tempests gather,  
The happy hour may soon be near  
That brings us pleasant weather:  
The weary night o' care and grief  
May hae a joyful morrow;  
So dawning day has brought relief—  
Fareweel our night o' sorrow!

## COUNTRY LASSIE.

TUNE—*The Country Lass.*

In simmer, when the hay was mawn,  
And corn waved green in ilka field,  
While claver blooms white o'er the lea,  
And roses blaw in ilka bield;  
Blithe Bessie in the milking shiel,  
Says: 'I'll be wed, come o't what will'  
Out spak a dame in wrinkled eild:  
'O' guid advisement comes nae ill.

'It's ye hae woovers mony ane,  
And, lassie, ye're but young, ye ken;  
Then wait a wee, and cannie wale  
A routhie butt, a routhie ben:  
There's Johnnie o' the Buskie Glen,  
Fu' is his barn, fu' is his byre;  
Tak this frae me, my bonnie hen,  
It's plenty beets the luvver's fire.'

'For Johnnie o' the Buskie Glen,  
I dinna care a single flie;  
He loes sae weel his craps and kye,  
He has nae luvve to spare for me:

But blithe's the blink o' Robbie's ee,  
 And, weel I wat, he loes me dear :  
 Ae blink o' him I wadna gie  
 For Buskie Glen and a' his gear.'

'O thoughtless lassie, life's a faught;  
 The canniest gate, the strife is sair;      wisest way  
 But aye fou han't is fechtin best,  
 A hungry care's an unco care:  
 But some will spend, and some will spare,  
 And wilfu' folk maun hae their will;  
 Syne as ye brew, my maiden fair,  
 Keep mind that ye maun drink the yill.'

'O gear will buy me rigs o' land,  
 And gear will buy me sheep and kye;  
 But the tender heart o' leesome luve  
 The gowd and siller canna buy.  
 We may be poor—Robbie and I,  
 Light is the burden luve lays on;  
 Content and luve brings peace and joy—  
 What mair hae queens upon a throne?'

---

FAIR ELIZA.

[Burns composed this song to a Highland air which he found in Macdonald's collection. In the original manuscript, the name of the heroine is Rabina, which he is understood to have afterwards changed to Eliza, for reasons of taste. Mr Stenhouse relates that the verses were designed to embody the passion of a Mr Hunter, a friend of the poet, towards a Rabina of real life, who, it would appear, was loved in vain, for the lover went to the West Indies and there died soon after his arrival.]

Turn again, thou fair Eliza,  
 Ae kind blink before we part,  
 Rue on thy despairing lover!  
 Canst thou break his faithfu' heart?  
 Turn again, thou fair Eliza;  
 If to love thy heart denies,  
 For pity hide the cruel sentence,  
 Under friendship's kind disguise!

Thee, dear maid, hae I offended!  
 The offence is loving thee:  
 Canst thou wreck his peace for ever,  
 Wha for thine wad gladly die?  
 While the life beats in my bosom,  
 Thou shalt mix in ilka throe;  
 Turn again, thou lovely maiden,  
 Ae sweet smile on me bestow.

Not the bee upon the blossom,  
 In the pride o' sunny noon;  
 Not the little sporting fairy,  
 All beneath the simmer moon:  
 Not the poet in the moment  
 Fancy lightens on his ee,  
 Kens the pleasure, feels the rapture  
 That thy presence gies to me.

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## O LUVE WILL VENTURE IN.

TUNE—*The Posie.*

O luve will venture in where it daurna weel be seen;  
 O luve will venture in where wisdom ance has been;  
 But I will down yon river rove, among the wood sae green—  
 And a' to pu' a posie to my ain dear May.

The primrose I will pu', the firstling o' the year,  
 And I will pu' the pink, the emblem o' my dear;  
 For she's the pink o' womankind, and blooms without a peer—  
 And a' to be a posie to my ain dear May.

I'll pu' the budding rose, when Phœbus peeps in view,  
 For it's like a baumy kiss o' her sweet bonnie mou';  
 The hyacinth for constancy, wi' its unchanging blue—  
 And a' to be a posie to my ain dear May.

The lily it is pure, and the lily it is fair,  
 And in her lovely bosom I'll place the lily there;  
 The daisy's for simplicity and unaffected air—  
 And a' to be a posie to my ain dear May.

The hawthorn I will pu' wi' its locks o' siller-gray,  
 Where, like an aged man, it stands at break of day;  
 But the songster's nest within the bush I winna tak away—  
 And a' to be a posie to my ain dear May.

The woodbine I will pu' when the e'ening star is near,  
 And the diamond draps o' dew shall be her een sae clear;  
 The violet's for modesty, which weel she fa's to wear—  
 And a' to be a posie to my ain dear May.

I'll tie the posie round wi' the silken band o' luve,  
 And I'll place it in her breast, and I'll swear by a' above,  
 That to my latest draught o' life the band shall ne'er remove—  
 And this shall be a posie to my ain dear May.

## THE BANKS OF DOON.

TUNE—*Caledonian Hunt's delight.*

Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon,  
 How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair;  
 How can ye chant, ye little birds,  
 And I sae weary fu' o' care!  
 Thou'lt break my heart, thou warbling bird,  
 That wantons through the flowering thorn:  
 Thou minds me o' departed joys,  
 Departed—never to return!

Aft hae I roved by bonnie Doon,  
 To see the rose and woodbine twine;  
 And ilka bird sang o' its luve,  
 And fondly sae did I o' mine.  
 Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,  
 Fu' sweet upon its thorny tree;  
 And my fause luvver stole my rose,  
 But ah! he left the thorn wi' me.

This, it will be observed, is a second version of the ballad which Burns produced in 1787 upon the sad fate of Miss Peggy K—. Although none of Burns's songs has been more popular than this, one cannot but regret its superseding so entirely the original ballad, which in touching simplicity of expression is certainly much superior.

## WILLIE WASTLE.

TUNE—*The Right Man of Moidart.*

Willie Wastle dwalt on Tweed,  
 The spot they called it Linkum-doddie;  
 Willie was a wabster guid,  
 Could stown a clew wi' ony bedie.  
 He had a wife was dour and din, hard  
 Oh, Tinkler Madgie was her mither—  
 Sic a wife as Willie had,  
 I wadna gie a button for her.  
 She has an ee—she has but ane,  
 The cat has twa the very colour;  
 Five rusty teeth, forbye a stump,  
 A clapper-tongue wad deave a miller:  
 A whiakin' beard about her mou',  
 Her nose and chin they threaten ither—  
 Sic a wife as Willie had,  
 I wadna gie a button for her.

She's bough-houghed, she's hein-shinned,  
 Ae limp'ing leg a hand-breed shorter ;  
 She's twisted right, she's twisted left,  
 To balance fair in ilka quarter :  
 She has a hump upon her breast,  
 The twin o' that upon her shoulder—  
 Sic a wife as Willie had,  
 I wadna gie a button for her.

Auld baudrons by the ingle sits,      the cat  
 And wi' her loof her face a-washin' ;      palm  
 But Willie's wife is nae sae trig,  
 She dights her grunzie wi' a hushion ;      mouth cushion  
 Her walie nieves like midden-creels,      huge fists  
 Her face wad fyle the Logan-Water—  
 Sic a wife as Willie had,  
 I wadna gie a button for her.

FLOW GENTLY, SWEET AFTON.

TUNE—*The Yellow-haired Laddie.*

Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,  
 Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise ;  
 My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,  
 Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

Thou stock-dove whose echo resounds through the glen,  
 Ye wild whistling blackbirds in yon thorny den,  
 Thou green-crested lapwing thy screaming forbear,  
 I charge you disturb not my slumbering fair.

How lofty, sweet Afton, thy neighbouring hills,  
 Far marked with the courses of clear winding rills ;  
 There daily I wander as noon rises high,  
 My flocks and my Mary's sweet cot in my eye.

How pleasant thy banks and green valleys below,  
 Where wild in the woodlands the primroses blow ;  
 There oft as mild evening weeps over the lea,  
 The sweet-scented birk shades my Mary and me.

Thy crystal stream, Afton, how lovely it glides,  
 And winds by the cot where my Mary resides ;  
 How wanton thy waters her snowy feet lave,  
 As gathering sweet flowerets she stems thy clear wave.

Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,  
 Flow gently, sweet river, the theme of my lays ;  
 My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,  
 Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

Dr Currie states that this song was composed in honour of Mrs Stewart of Stair, whose paternal property was situated on the banks of the Afton, an Ayrshire tributary of the Nith, near New Cumnock. Mrs Stewart, it will be recollected, was one of the first persons of rank who knew or extended any friendship to Burns. In a paper by Mr Gilbert Burns, communicating to Mr George Thomson memoranda of the subjects of his brother's songs, *Flow gently, Sweet Afton* is thus noticed:—'The poet's Highland Mary. But Dr Currie gives a different account of it. . . . G. B. thinks Dr C. misinformed in several of the above particulars; but he must not be contradicted.' It may be doubted if Mr Gilbert Burns was rightly informed on the subject.

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#### THE SMILING SPRING.

TUNE—*The Bonny Bell.*

The smiling spring comes in rejoicing,  
And surly winter grimly flies;  
Now crystal clear are the falling waters,  
And bonnie blue are the sunny skies.  
Fresh o'er the mountains breaks forth the morning,  
The evening gilds the ocean's swell;  
All creatures joy in the sun's returning,  
And I rejoice in my bonnie Bell.

The flowery spring leads sunny summer,  
And yellow autumn presses near,  
Then in his turn comes gloomy winter,  
Till smiling spring again appear.  
Thus seasons dancing, life advancing,  
Old Time and Nature their changes tell,  
But never ranging, still unchanging,  
I adore my bonnie Bell.

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#### THE GALLANT WEAVER.

TUNE—*The Weavers' March.*

Where Cart rins rowin' to the sea,  
By mony a flower and spreading tree,  
There lives a lad, the lad for me,  
He is a gallant weaver.

O I had woovers aucht or nine,  
They gied me rings and ribbons fine;  
And I was feared my heart would tine,  
And I gied it to the weaver.

My daddie signed my tocher-band,  
 To gie the lad that has the land;  
 But to my heart I'll add my hand,  
 And gie it to the weaver.

dowry-bond

While birds rejoice in leafy bowers;  
 While bees delight in opening flowers;  
 While corn grows green in simmer showers,  
 I'll love my gallant weaver.

## SHE'S FAIR AND FAUSE.

TUNE—*She's Fair and Fause.*

She's fair and fause that causes my smart, false  
 I loed her meikle and lang;  
 She's broken her vow, she's broken my heart,  
 And I may e'en gae hang.

A coof cam in wi' routh o' gear, foel abundance  
 And I hae tint my dearest dear; lost  
 But woman is but warld's gear,  
 Sae let the bonnie lass gang.

Whae'er ye be that woman love,  
 To this be never blind—  
 Nae ferlie 'tis though fickle she prove, wonder  
 A woman has't by kind.

O woman, lovely woman fair!  
 An angel form's fa'n to thy share,  
 'Twad been ower meikle to gien thee mair—  
 I mean an angel mind.

[In a song entitled *The Address*, which appears in *The Lark* (3 vols. 1765), there is a passage which perhaps suggested the thought in the fourth stanza of the above song—

"Twixt pleasing hope and painful fear  
 True love divided lies;  
 With artless look and soul sincere,  
 Above all mean disguise.  
 For Celia thus my heart has moved,  
 Accept it, lovely fair;  
 I've liked before, but never loved,  
 Then let me not despair.  
 My fate before your feet I lay,  
 Sentence your willing slave;  
 Remember that though tyrants slay,  
 Yet heavenly powers save.



To bless is heaven's peculiar grace,  
 Let me a blessing find;  
*And since you wear an angel's face,  
 O shew an angel's mind.]*

Mrs Dunlop had written to Burns regarding her widowed daughter, Mrs Henri, who had gone to France with her infant, in order to introduce him to his father's family. The dethronement of the king and proclamation of a republic, and the wild outrageous proceedings against all persons of rank suspected of royalist feelings, had involved the young widow in serious troubles, to which the state of her own health was no light addition.

TO MRS DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, 24th September 1793.

I HAVE this moment, my dear madam, yours of the 23d. All your other kind reproaches, your news, &c. are out of my head, when I read and think on Mrs Henri's situation. Good God! a heart-wounded, helpless young woman—in a strange, foreign land, and that land convulsed with every horror that can harrow the human feelings—sick—looking, longing for a comforter, but finding none—a mother's feelings too—but it is too much: He who wounded—He only can—may He heal!

I wish the farmer great joy of his new acquisition to his family.<sup>1</sup>  
 \* \* \* I cannot say that I give him joy of his life as a farmer. 'Tis as a farmer paying a dear, unconscionable rent—a *cursed life!* As to a laird farming his own property; sowing his own corn in hope; and reaping it, in spite of brittle weather, in gladness; knowing that none can say unto him, 'what dost thou?'—fattening his herds; shearing his flocks; rejoicing at Christmas; and begetting sons and daughters, until he be the venerated, gray-haired leader of a little tribe—'tis a heavenly life! but devil take the life of reaping the fruits that another must eat.

Well, your kind wishes will be gratified as to seeing me when I make my Ayrshire visit. I cannot leave Mrs B. until her nine months' race is run, which may, perhaps, be in three or four weeks. She, too, seems determined to make me the patriarchal leader of a band. However, if Heaven will be so obliging as to let me have them in the proportion of three boys to one girl, I shall be so much the more pleased. I hope, if I am spared with them, to shew a set of boys that will do honour to my cares and name; but I am not equal to the task of rearing girls. Besides, I am too poor—a girl should always have a fortune. Apropos: your little godson is thriving charmingly, but is a very devil. He, though two years younger, has completely mastered his brother. Robert is indeed the mildest, gentlest creature I ever saw. He has a most surprising memory, and is quite the pride of his schoolmaster.

<sup>1</sup> A son of Mrs Dunlop.

You know how readily we get into prattle upon a subject dear to our heart—you can excuse it. God bless you and yours! R. B.

It so happened, nevertheless, that Mrs Burns brought her husband a girl, born on the 21st November. The child was named Elizabeth Riddel, in honour of the lady of Friars' Carse, and lived to be a great favourite with her father. A native of Dumfries puts Burns into an attitude more than usually pleasing to contemplate, in describing him, as she has often seen him, sitting in the summer evenings at his door with this little infant in his arms, dandling her, singing to her, and trying to elicit her mental faculties. It will be found that the child was not destined to a long life, and that her death was a source of the deepest affliction to our poet at a time when other woes were pressing upon him.

Mrs Riddel had visited Edinburgh in January, had made the acquaintance of Mr Smellie, and soon after (March 7th) we find her transmitting to that sage her manuscript of travels. In an accompanying letter she alludes to our poet. 'Robbie Burns dined with us the other day. He is in good health and spirits; but I fear his Muse will not be so frequent in her inspirations, now that he has forsaken his rural occupations.' Smellie read the lady's manuscript with surprise. He says, March 27th: 'When I considered your youth, and still more your sex, the perusal of your ingenious and judicious work, if I had not previously had the pleasure of your conversation, the devil himself could not have frightened me into the belief that a female human creature could, in the bloom of youth, beauty, and consequently of giddiness, have produced a performance so much out of the line of your ladies' works. Smart little poems, flippant romances, are not uncommon; but science, minute observation, accurate description, and excellent composition, are qualities seldom to be met with in the female world.'<sup>1</sup> It seems worth while to transcribe these sentences of Smellie, in order to help out our picture of a lady who certainly was one of the most intimate friends that Burns ever had, and whose character of course, on the principle of *noscitur a sociis*, serves as an illustration of his own.

A small volume being put by Mrs Riddel to Smellie's press, the acquaintance between that pair advanced during the summer, and at length in September, when the book was nearly ready for publication,<sup>2</sup> the eccentric naturalist came to Dumfries, and spent

<sup>1</sup> Kerr's *Memoirs of William Smellie*, 2 vols.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs Riddel's work is announced in the *Scots Magazine* of November 1792, as published, under the following title:—*Voyages to the Madeira and Leeward Caribbee Islands; with Sketches of the Natural History of these Islands*. By Maria R. \* \* \* \* \* Cadell, London; Hill, Edinburgh.

some time with the lady and his friend *Rabbie*. The gay young authoress seduced Smellie to present his extraordinary figure at one of the assemblies of Dumfries, and it is understood that he and Burns received some species of public entertainment from the magistrates. There must have been some brilliant though *mixed* scenes at Woodley Park and elsewhere on this occasion—vivid gaiety from the lady, wit, sense, knowledge from Smellie, flashes of electric genius from Burns. They would differ from such *reunions* in our own time, in as far as there was then less restraint of speech. Even a woman of refinement in those days had to stand a great deal from her male friends. For example, we find Smellie telling Mrs Riddel, after a two months' acquaintance: 'Your name, to quiet your conscience, shall be contracted Maria R——, though I still think it would do great honour to any \* \* \* \* in Britain.' The blank left by our authority can of course be easily supplied.

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MR THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 13th Oct. 1792.

DEAR SIR—I received with much satisfaction your pleasant and obliging letter, and I return my warmest acknowledgments for the enthusiasm with which you have entered into our undertaking. We have now no doubt of being able to produce a collection highly deserving of public attention in all respects.

I agree with you in thinking English verses, that have merit, very eligible, wherever new verses are necessary, because the English becomes every year, more and more, the language of Scotland; but if you mean that no English verses, except those by Scottish authors, ought to be admitted, I am half inclined to differ from you. I should consider it unpardonable to sacrifice one good song in the Scottish dialect, to make room for English verses; but if we can select a few excellent ones suited to the unprovided or ill-provided airs, would it not be the very bigotry of literary patriotism to reject such, merely because the authors were born south of the Tweed? Our sweet air, *My Nannie, O!* which in the collections is joined to the poorest stuff that Allan Ramsay ever wrote, beginning, *While some for pleasure pawn their health*, answers so finely to Dr Percy's beautiful song, *O Nancy, wilt thou go with me?* that one would think he wrote it on purpose for the air. However, it is not at all our wish to confine you to English verses: you shall freely be allowed a sprinkling of your native tongue, as you elegantly express it; and, moreover, we will patiently wait your own time. One thing only I beg, which is, that, however gay and sportive the Muse may be, she may always be decent. Let her not write what beauty would blush to speak, nor wound that charming delicacy which forms the most precious dowry of our daughters. I do not conceive the song to be the most proper vehicle

for witty and brilliant conceits; simplicity, I believe, should be its prominent feature; but in some of our songs the writers have confounded simplicity with coarseness and vulgarity; although, between the one and the other, as Dr Beattie well observes, there is as great a difference as between a plain suit of clothes and a bundle of rags. The humorous ballad or pathetic complaint is best suited to our artless melodies; and more interesting, indeed, in all songs, than the most pointed wit, dazzling descriptions, and flowery fancies.

With these trite observations, I send you eleven of the songs, for which it is my wish to substitute others of your writing. I shall soon transmit the rest, and, at the same time, a prospectus of the whole collection; and you may believe we will receive any hints that you are so kind as to give for improving the work with the greatest pleasure and thankfulness. I remain, dear sir, &c.

## BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

MY DEAR SIR—Let me tell you that you are too fastidious in your ideas of songs and ballads. I own that your criticisms are just: the songs you specify in your list have, all but one, the faults you remark in them; but who shall mend the matter? Who shall rise up and say, 'Go to! I will make a better?' For instance, on reading over *The Lea-Rig*, I immediately set about trying my hand on it, and, after all, I could make nothing more of it than the following, which Heaven knows, is poor enough:—

## THE LEA-RIG.

TUNE—*The Lea-Rig*.

When o'er the hill the eastern star	
Tells bughtin time is near, my jo;	foldin'
And owsen frae the furrowed field,	
Return sae dowf and weary O;	dull
Down by the burn, where scented birks	
Wi' dew are hanging clear, my jo,	
I'll meet thee on the lea-rig,	
My ain kind dearie O.	
In mirkest glen, at midnight hour,	
I'd rove, and ne'er be eerie O,	afraid
If through that glen I gaed to thee,	
My ain kind dearie O.	
Although the night were ne'er sae wet, <sup>1</sup>	
And I were ne'er sae wearie O,	
I'd meet thee on the lea-rig,	
My ain kind dearie O.	

<sup>1</sup> This word, which raises an unpleasant idea as to the situation of the lovers, was subsequently altered by the poet to wild—'evidently a great improvement,' says Dr Currie.

Your observation as to the aptitude of Dr Percy's ballad to the air, *Nannie, O!* is just. It is besides, perhaps, the most beautiful ballad in the English language. But let me remark to you, that in the sentiment and style of our Scottish airs, there is a pastoral simplicity, a something that one may call the Doric style and dialect of vocal music, to which a dash of our native tongue and manners is particularly, nay peculiarly, apposite. For this reason, and, upon my honour, for this reason alone, I am of opinion—but, as I told you before, my opinion is yours, freely yours, to approve or reject, as you please—that my ballad of *Nannie, O!* might perhaps do for one set of verses to the tune. Now don't let it enter into your head that you are under any necessity of taking my verses. I have long ago made up my mind as to my own reputation in the business of authorship, and have nothing to be pleased or offended at in your adoption or rejection of my verses. Though you should reject one half of what I give you, I shall be pleased with your adopting the other half, and shall continue to serve you with the same assiduity.

In the printed copy of *My Nannie, O!* the name of the river is horribly prosaic. I will alter it:

'Behind yon hills where Lugar flows.'

Girvan is the name of the river that suits the idea of the stanza best, but Lugar is the most agreeable modulation of syllables.

I will soon give you a great many more remarks on this business; but I have just now an opportunity of conveying you this scrawl, free of postage, an expense that it is ill able to pay;<sup>1</sup> so, with my best compliments to honest Allan, Gude be wi' ye, &c.

*Friday night.*

*Saturday morning.*

As I find I have still an hour to spare this morning before my conveyance goes away, I will give you *Nannie, O!* at length.

Your remarks on *Ewe-bughts, Marion*, are just; still it has obtained a place among our more classical Scottish songs; and what with many beauties in its composition, and more prejudices in its favour, you will not find it easy to supplant it.

In my very early years, when I was thinking of going to the West Indies, I took the following farewell of a dear girl. It is quite trifling, and has nothing of the merits of *Ewe-bughts*; but it will fill up this page. You must know that all my earlier love-songs were the breathings of ardent passion, and though it might have been easy in after-times to have given them a polish, yet that polish to me, whose they were, and who perhaps alone cared for them, would have defaced the legend of my heart, which was so faithfully inscribed on them. Their uncouth simplicity was, as they say of wines, their race.

[Here follows the song, *Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary?* Mr Thomson did not adopt the song in his collection.]

*Gala Water* and *Auld Rob Morris*, I think, will most probably be

<sup>1</sup> The postage marked on the first letter of Burns to Mr Thomson is 8d.—so modestly did the poet regard these brilliant contributions to his friend's work.

the next subject of my musings. However, even on my verses, speak out your criticisms with equal frankness. My wish is, not to stand aloof, the uncomplaining bigot of *opiniotreté*, but cordially to join issue with you<sup>1</sup> in the furtherance of the work.

A temporary absence occurred at this time. On his return, the bard found a letter of Mrs Dunlop, informing him of the melancholy death of her daughter, Mrs Henri.<sup>2</sup>

## TO MRS DUNLOP.

[DUMFRIES, October 1792.]

I HAD been from home, and did not receive your letter until my return the other day. What shall I say to comfort you, my much-valued, much-afflicted friend! I can but grieve with you; consolation I have none to offer, except that which religion holds out to the children of affliction—(*children of affliction!*—how just the expression!)—and, like every other family, they have matters among them which they hear, see, and feel in a serious, all-important manner, of which the world has not, nor cares to have, any idea. The world looks indifferently on, makes the passing remark, and proceeds to the next novel occurrence.

Alas, madam! who would wish for many years! What is it but to drag existence until our joys gradually expire, and leave us in a night of misery—like the gloom which blots out the stars, one by one, from the face of night, and leaves us without a ray of comfort in the howling waste!

I am interrupted, and must leave off. You shall soon hear from me again. R. B.

## BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

November 8, 1792.

If you mean, my dear sir, that all the songs in your collection shall be poetry of the first merit, I am afraid you will find more difficulty in the undertaking than you are aware of. There is a peculiar rhythmus in many of our airs, and a necessity of adapting syllables to the emphasis, or what I would call the feature-notes of the tune, that cramp the poet, and lay him under almost insuperable difficulties. For instance, in the air, *My Wife's a Wanton Wee Thing*, if a few lines smooth and pretty can be adapted to it, it is all you can expect. The following were made extempore to it; and though, on further study, I might give you something more profound, yet it

<sup>1</sup> It will be observed that Burns here uses a familiar English law-term in a contrary sense.

<sup>2</sup> Sept. 15, [died] at Muges, Aiguillon, Mrs Henry, widow of the late James Henry, Esq.—*Scots Mag.* 1792.

might not suit the light-horse gallop of the air so well as this random clink :—

MY WIFE'S A WINSOME WEE THING.

She is a winsome wee thing,  
She is a handsome wee thing,  
She is a bonnie wee thing,<sup>1</sup>  
This sweet wee wife o' mine.

I never saw a fairer,  
I never loed a dearer;  
And neist my heart I'll wear her,  
For fear my jewel tine.

O leeze me on my wee thing,  
My bonnie blithesome wee thing;  
Sae lang's I hae my wee thing,  
I'll think my lot divine.

Though warld's care we share o't,  
And may see meikle mair o't;  
Wi' her I'll blithely bear it,  
And ne'er a word repine.

I have just been looking over the *Collier's Bonnie Dochter*; and if the following rhapsody, which I composed the other day on a charming Ayrshire girl, Miss Lesley Baillie of Mayfield, as she passed through this place to England, will suit your taste better than the *Collier Lassie*, fall on and welcome :—

[Here follows *Bonnie Lesley*, which see *antea*.]

I have hitherto deferred the sublimer, more pathetic airs, until more leisure, as they will take, and deserve, a greater effort. However, they are all put into your hands, as clay into the hands of the potter, to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour. Farewell, &c.

BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

14th November 1792.

HIGHLAND MARY.

TUNE—*Katharine Ogilvie*.

Ye banks, and braes, and streams around  
The castle o' Montgomery,  
Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,  
Your waters never drummie!

mudly

<sup>1</sup> Manuscript—'She is a winsome wee thing.' The alteration was by Mr Thomson.

There simmer first unfaulted her robes,  
 And there the longest tarry;  
 For there I took the last fareweel  
 O' my sweet Highland Mary.

How sweetly bloomed the gay green birk,  
 How rich the hawthorn's blossom,  
 As underneath their fragrant shade  
 I clasped her to my bosom!  
 The golden hours, on angel wings,  
 Flew o'er me and my dearie;  
 For dear to me as light and life,  
 Was my sweet Highland Mary.

Wi' mony a vow, and locked embrace,  
 Our parting was su' tender;  
 And, pledging aft to meet again,  
 We tore oursel's asunder:  
 But, oh! fell death's untimely frost,  
 That nipt my flower sae early!  
 Now green's the sod, and cauld's the clay,  
 That wraps my Highland Mary!

O pale, pale now, those rosy lips,  
 I aft hae kissed sae fondly!  
 And closed for aye the sparkling glance  
 That dwelt on me sae kindly:  
 And mouldering now in silent dust  
 That heart that loed me dearly!  
 But still within my bosom's core  
 Shall live my Highland Mary.

MY DEAR SIR.—I agree with you that the song, *Katharine Ogie*, is very poor stuff, and unworthy, altogether unworthy, of so beautiful an air. I tried to mend it, but the awkward sound, *Ogie*, recurring so often in the rhyme, spoils every attempt at introducing sentiment into the piece. The foregoing song pleases myself; I think it is in my happiest manner: you will see at first glance that it suits the air. The subject of the song is one of the most interesting passages of my youthful days, and I own that I should be much flattered to see the verses set to an air which would insure celebrity. Perhaps, after all, 'tis the still glowing prejudice of my heart that throws a borrowed lustre over the merits of the composition.

I have partly taken your idea of *Auld Rob Morris*. I have adopted the two first verses, and am going on with the song on a new plan, which promises pretty well. I take up one or another, just as the bee of the moment buzzes in my bonnet-lug; and do you, *sans cérémonie*, make what use you choose of the productions. Adieu, &c.



In those days, the little theatre of Dumfries was pretty regularly open each winter under the care of a Mr Sutherland, whom we have already seen Burns patronising while he resided at Ellisland. In the *corps dramatique* was a Miss Fontenelle, a smart and pretty little creature, who played Little Pickle in the *Spoiled Child*, and other such characters. Burns, who was fond of the English drama, admired the performances of Miss Fontenelle, and was disposed to befriend her. We find him taxing his muse in her behalf.

THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN,

AN OCCASIONAL ADDRESS SPOKEN BY MISS FONTENELLE ON HER BENEFIT  
NIGHT [Nov. 26, 1792.]<sup>1</sup>

While Europe's eye is fixed on mighty things,  
The fate of empires and the fall of kings ;  
While quacks of state must each produce his plan,  
And even children lisp the Rights of Man ;  
Amid this mighty fuss just let me mention,  
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.

First, in the sexes' intermixed connection,  
One sacred Right of Woman is—Protection.  
The tender flower that lifts its head, elate,  
Helpless, must fall before the blasts of fate,  
Sunk on the earth, defaced its lovely form,  
Unless your shelter ward th' impending storm.

Our second Right—but needless here is caution,  
To keep that right inviolate's the fashion,  
Each man of sense has it so full before him,  
He'd die before he'd wrong it—'tis Decorum.  
There was, indeed, in far less polished days,  
A time when rough rude man had naughty ways ;  
Would swagger, swear, get drunk, kick up a riot,  
Nay, even thus invade a lady's quiet.  
Now, thank our stars ! these Gothic times are fled ;  
Now, well-bred men—and you are all well-bred—  
Most justly think (and we are much the gainers)  
Such conduct neither spirit, wit, nor manners.<sup>2</sup>

For Right the third, our last, our best, our dearest,  
That right to fluttering female hearts the nearest,

<sup>1</sup> The bill of the night announces the *Country Girl* as the play, and that, thereafter, 'Miss Fontenelle will deliver a new Occasional Address, written by Mr Robert Burns, called *The Rights of Woman*.'—*Dumfrie: Times Newspaper*.

<sup>2</sup> An ironical allusion to the annual saturnalia of the Caledonian Hunt at Dumfries.

Which even the Rights of Kings in low prostration  
 Most humbly own—'tis dear, dear Admiration !  
 In that blest sphere alone we live and move ;  
 There taste that life of life—immortal love.  
 Smiles, glances, sighs, tears, fits, flirtations, airs,  
 'Gainst such an host what flinty savage dares—  
 When awful Beauty joins with all her charms,  
 Who is so rash as rise in rebel arms !  
 But truce with kings and truce with constitutions,  
 With bloody armaments and revelutions,  
 Let majesty your first attention summon,  
 Ah ! *ça ira* ! THE MAJESTY OF WOMAN !

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## TO MISS FONTENELLE.

MADAM—In such a bad world as ours, those who add to the scanty sum of our pleasures are positively our benefactors. To you, madam, on our humble Dumfries boards, I have been more indebted for entertainment than ever I was in prouder theatres. Your charms as a woman would insure applause to the most indifferent actress, and your theatrical talents would insure admiration to the plainest figure. This, madam, is not the unmeaning or insidious compliment of the frivolous or interested ; I pay it from the same honest impulse that the sublime of nature excites my admiration, or her beauties give me delight.

Will the foregoing lines be of any service to you in your approaching benefit night ? If they will, I shall be prouder of my Muse than ever. They are nearly extempore : I know they have no great merit ; but though they should add but little to the entertainment of the evening, they give me the happiness of an opportunity to declare how much I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

## TO MISS FONTENELLE, ON SEEING HER IN A FAVOURITE CHARACTER.

Sweet naïveté of feature,  
 Simple, wild, enchanting elf,  
 Not to thee, but thanks to Nature,  
 Thou art acting but thyself.

Wert thou awkward, stiff, affected,  
 Spurning nature, torturing art ;  
 Loves and graces all rejected,  
 Then indeed thou'dst act a part.

The November of this year—the time when his daughter was given to him, and when he found leisure and spirits to attend the theatre and confer on a favourite actress the help of his pen—appears to have been a period of darkness with Burns. We can see in some of his letters of this period the contortions of a spirit which felt itself under an unworthy bondage, and altogether out of harmony with circumstances.

Mrs Riddel was about to bespeak a play at the theatre :

TO MRS RIDDEL.

I am thinking to send my *Address* to some periodical publication, but it has not got your sanction ; so pray look over it.

As to the Tuesday's play, let me beg of you, my dear madam, to give us *The Wonder, a Woman keeps a Secret!* to which please add *The Spoilt Child*—you will highly oblige me by so doing.

Ah, what an enviable creature you are! There now, this cursed gloomy blue-devil day, you are going to a party of choice spirits—

‘ To play the shapes  
Of frolic fancy, and incessant form  
Those rapid pictures, an assembled train  
Of fleet ideas, never joined before,  
Where lively wit excites to gay surprise ;  
Or folly-painting *humour*, grave himself,  
Calls laughter forth, deep shaking every nerve.’

But as you rejoice with them that do rejoice, do also remember to weep with them that weep, and pity your melancholy friend,

R. B.

Another lady had agreed to honour a benefit with her patronage :

TO ———

MADAM—You were so very good as to promise me to honour my friend with your presence on his benefit night. That night is fixed for Friday first : the play a most interesting one—*The Way to Keep Him*. I have the pleasure to know Mr G. well. His merit as an actor is generally acknowledged. He has genius and worth which would do honour to patronage : he is a poor and modest man ; claims which, from their very *silence*, have the more forcible power on the generous heart. Alas, for pity ! that from the indolence of those who have the good things of this life in their gift, too often does brazen-fronted importunity snatch that boon, the rightful due of retiring, humble want ! Of all the qualities we assign to the Author and Director of Nature, by far the most enviable is, to be able ‘ to wipe away all tears from all eyes.’ O what insignificant, sordid wretches are they, however chance may have loaded them with

wealth, who go to their graves, to their magnificent *mausoleums*, with hardly the consciousness of having made one poor honest heart happy.

But I crave your pardon, madam ; I came to beg, not to preach.

R. B.

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TO MRS RIDDEL.

I WILL wait on you, my ever-valued friend, but whether in the morning I am not sure. Sunday closes a period of our cursed revenue business, and may probably keep me employed with my pen until noon. Fine employment for a poet's pen ! There is a species of the human genius that I call *the gin-horse class* : what enviable dogs they are ! Round, and round, and round they go. Mundell's ox, that drives his cotton-mill,<sup>1</sup> is their exact prototype—without an idea or wish beyond their circle—fat, sleek, stupid, patient, quiet, and contented ; while here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a d—— melange of fretfulness and melancholy ; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to repose me in torpor ; my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement, like a wild-finch, caught amid the horrors of winter, and newly thrust into a cage. Well, I am persuaded that it was of me the Hebrew sage prophesied, when he foretold—' And, behold, on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper ! ' If my resentment is awaked, it is sure to be where it dare not squeak ; and if— \* \* \*

Pray that wisdom and bliss be more frequent visitors of

R. B.

It is somewhat startling to find this sudden access of melancholy in the midst of a bustling routine of business which left little time for meditation, and while the Muse was eager to use every spare moment for those pastoral effusions which so much gratified Mr Thomson. The source of the evil does not seem to have been in any part of the external lot of Burns. Again ' MOI-MEME ' was his worst enemy.

In the summer of 1790, as well as in that of the subsequent year, Mrs Burns had left her husband for several weeks, while she visited her father and mother at Mauchline. It was natural for the young wife to desire to spend a little time with her own relations, and to shew them her thriving young brood ; but it was an injudicious step for the wife of such a husband : it tended to break the good domestic habits which for some time our poet had been forming. His sister Agnes, who had been at Ellisland from the beginning superintending the dairy, used

<sup>1</sup> A small cotton-mill belonging to a Mr Mundell was at this time in full activity in Dumfries.

to say that she never knew him fail to keep good hours at night till the first unlucky absence of her sister-in-law in Ayrshire. When there is no loved one at the fireside to be pleased by a husband's early return to that region of connubial happiness, one great reason for regularity in the life of the husband is wanting. When a wife is long absent, the loyalty of the most devoted husbands will be apt in some small degree to abate. These dangers were particularly great in the case of a social-spirited, impressionable man like Robert Burns, of whom we have seen his brother state that, with regard to his bachelor loves, 'while one was reigning paramount in his affections, he was frequently encountering other attractions, which formed so many under-plots in the drama of his love.' That openness to a succession of new and supervening passions which had been closed since his marriage two years ago, appears to have been renewed during the absence of the legitimate divinity. Burns, in short—and it seems best to be at once brief and explicit—forgot on this occasion a sacred obligation, and established what was to him a source of distressful recollection for the remainder of his life. The story is one of bitterness and humiliation to all the admirers of this great genius, for who can but grieve to think of noble qualities of mind and heart degraded by such errors? Yet it is not a tale without its redeeming traits. It presents us, first, a poor girl, lost to the reputable world; next Burns, seeking an asylum for a helpless infant at his brother's;<sup>1</sup> then a magnanimous wife interposing with the almost romantically-generous offer to become herself its nurse and guardian. Here one could almost persuade himself he saw a final cause for sin in the generous atoning sacrifices which it may evoke from the innocent for the sake of the guilty. The babe was soon after found by Jean's father in the same cradle with a child of her own, and drew from him the surprised inquiry if she had again had twins; when she quietly answered, that the second baby was one of whom she was taking temporary charge for a sick friend. She brought up the little girl to womanhood with an unvarying kindness of demeanour which created a filial degree of attachment; and we cannot doubt that she never uttered one word of complaint on the subject to her repentant husband.

It was just at the crisis at which we are now arrived that Mrs Burns accidentally became aware of the evil consequences of her Mauchline visits. Though the fact was regarded on her part

<sup>1</sup> This child obtained the name of Elizabeth, which was a favourite one with Burns, and borne by each of all the three daughters born to him. She is now (1851) a Mrs Thomson, in humble life at Pollockshaws, Renfrewshire, and is said to be of all his children the only one strikingly like himself.

with a heavenly mildness, the consciousness of his error did not the less gall the sensitive spirit of our poet. Let us hope that his mental pains did not solely refer to the mere discovery of his guilt, or to the penalty of vexatious and hard-borne expenses which it brought upon him. It is, however, a significant fact, that one of those fits of melancholy tinged with splenetic views of society which make their appearance in Burns's letters, coincided in time with an affair which we know must have been attended with grievous self-accusations. May we not reasonably suspect that others of his misanthropic effusions sprang from the heart's own bitterness with itself? Alas! is not this the ordinary explanation of such effusions? Is there really in the world anything greatly to discompose a man, besides the Promethean vulture of a sense of his own errors?

Amidst all chafings of the pained spirit, our bard could carry on his pleasant correspondence with Mr Thomson respecting new songs proposed for old melodies—pastoral sighings breathed while his own soul was wholly out of joint, and most men were gazing appalled at what appeared an outbreak of Tartarus in a neighbouring country.

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 MR THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, Nov. 1792.

DEAR SIR—I was just going to write to you, that on meeting with your Nannie I had fallen violently in love with her. I thank you, therefore, for sending the charming rustic to me, in the dress you wish her to appear before the public. She does you great credit, and will soon be admitted into the best company.

I regret that your song for the *Lea-Rig* is so short: the air is easy, soon sung, and very pleasing; so that, if the singer stops at the end of two stanzas, it is a pleasure lost ere it is well possessed.

Although a dash of our native tongue and manners is doubtless peculiarly congenial and appropriate to our melodies, yet I shall be able to present a considerable number of the very Flowers of English song, well adapted to those melodies, which, in England at least, will be the means of recommending them to still greater attention than they have procured there. But you will observe my plan is, that every air shall, in the first place, have verses wholly by Scottish poets; and that those of English writers shall follow as additional songs for the choice of the singer.

What you say of the *Ewe-bughts* is just; I admire it, and never meant to supplant it. All I requested was, that you would try your hand on some of the inferior stanzas, which are apparently no part of the original song; but this I do not urge, because the song is of

sufficient length though those inferior stanzas be omitted, as they will be by the singer of taste. You must not think I expect all the songs to be of superlative merit; that were an unreasonable expectation. I am sensible that no poet can sit down doggedly to pen verses, and succeed well at all times.

I am highly pleased with your humorous and amorous rhapsody on *Bonnie Lesley*: it is a thousand times better than the *Collier's Lassie*. 'The deil he couldna scaith thee,' &c. is an eccentric and happy thought. Do you not think, however, that the names of such old heroes as Alexander sound rather queer, unless in pompous or mere barlesque verse! Instead of the line, 'And never made anither,' I would humbly suggest, 'And ne'er made sic anither;' and I would fain have you substitute some other line for 'Return to Caledonia,' in the last verse, because I think this alteration of the orthography and of the sound of Caledonia, disfigures the word, and renders it Hudibrastic.

Of the other song, *My Wife's a Winsome Wee Thing*, I think the first eight lines very good; but I do not admire the other eight, because four of them are a bare repetition of the first verses. I have been trying to spin a stanza, but could make nothing better than the following: do you mend it, or, as Yorick did with the love-letter, whip it up in your own way:—

O leeze me on my wee thing,  
My bonnie blithesome wee thing;  
Sae lang's I hae my wee thing,  
I'll think my lot divine.

Though warld's care we share o't,  
And may see meikle mair o't,  
Wi' her I'll blithely bear it,  
And ne'er a word repine.

You perceive, my dear sir, I avail myself of the liberty which you condescend to allow me by speaking freely what I think. Be assured, it is not my disposition to pick out the faults of any poem or picture I see; my first and chief object is to discover and be delighted with the beauties of the piece. If I sit down to examine critically, and at leisure, what perhaps you have written in haste, I may happen to observe careless lines, the reperusal of which might lead you to improve them. The wren will often see what has been overlooked by the eagle. I remain yours faithfully, &c.

*P. S.*—Your verses upon *Highland Mary* are just come to hand: they breathe the genuine spirit of poetry, and, like the music, will last for ever. Such verses, united to such an air, with the delicate harmony of Pleyel superadded, might form a treat worthy of being presented to Apollo himself. I have heard the sad story of your *Mary*; you always seem inspired when you write of her.

## BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

DUMFRIES, 1st Dec. 1792.

YOUR alterations of *My Nannie, O!* are perfectly right. So are those of *My Wife's a Winsome Wee Thing*. Your alteration of the second stanza is a positive improvement. Now, my dear sir, with the freedom which characterises our correspondence, I must not, cannot alter *Bonnie Lesley*. You are right; the word 'Alexander' makes the line a little uncouth, but I think the thought is pretty. Of Alexander, beyond all other heroes, it may be said, in the sublime language of Scripture, that 'he went forth conquering and to conquer.'

For nature made her what she is,  
And never made anither. (Such a person as she is.)

This is, in my opinion, more poetical than 'Ne'er made sic anither.' However, it is immaterial; make it either way. 'Caledonie,' I agree with you, is not so good a word as could be wished, though it is sanctioned in three or four instances by Allan Ramsay; but I cannot help it. In short, that species of stanza is the most difficult that I have ever tried.

The *Lea-Rig* is as follows:—

## THE LEA-RIG.

TUNE—*The Lea-Rig*.

When o'er the hill the eastern star  
Tells bughtin time is near, my jo;  
And owsen frae the furrowed field  
Return sae dowf and weary O:  
Down by the burn, where scented birks<sup>1</sup>  
Wi' dew are hanging clear, my jo,  
I'll meet thee on the lea-rig,  
My ain kind dearie O.

In mirkest glen, at midnight hour,  
I'd rove, and ne'er be eerie O,  
If through that glen I gaed to thee,  
My ain kind dearie O.  
Although the night were ne'er sae wild,  
And I were ne'er sae wearie O,  
I'd meet thee on the lea-rig,  
My ain kind dearie O.

<sup>1</sup> For 'scented birks,' in some copies 'birken buda,'



The hunter loses the morning sun,  
 To rouse the mountain deer, my jo :  
 At noon the fisher seeks the glen,  
 Along the burn to steer, my jo ;  
 Gie me the hour o' gloamin gray,  
 It makes my heart as cheery O,  
 To meet thee on the lea-rig,  
 My ain kind dearie O.

I am interrupted. Yours, &c.

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BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

4th December 1792.

AULD ROB MORRIS.

There's auld Rob Morris that wons in yon glen, dwells  
 He's the king o' guid fellows and wale o' auld men ; choice  
 He has gowd in his coffers, he has owsen and kine,  
 And as bonnie lassie, his darling and mine.

She's fresh as the morning, the fairest in May ;  
 She's sweet as the evening among the new hay ;  
 As blithe and as artless as the lambs on the lea,  
 And dear to my heart as the light to my ee.

But oh ! she's an heiress, auld Robin's a laird,  
 And my daddie has nought but a cot-house and yard ;  
 A weaver like me maunna hope to come speed,  
 The wounds I must hide that will soon be my dead. death

The day comes to me, but delight brings me nane ;  
 The night comes to me, but my rest it is gane ;  
 I wander my lane like a night-troubled ghaist,  
 And I sigh as my heart it wad burst in my breast.

O had she but been of a lower degree,  
 I then might hae hoped she wad smiled upon me !  
 O how past describing had then been my bliss,  
 As now my distraction no words can express !

---

DUNCAN GRAY.

Duncan Gray cam here to woo,  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't,  
 On blithe Yule-night when we were fou,  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Maggie coost her head fu' high,  
 Looked asklent and unco skeigh,  
 Gart poor Duncan stand abeigh ;  
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

coy  
 aloof

Duncan fleeced, and Duncan prayed ;  
 Ha, ha, &c. ;

flattered

Meg was deaf as Ailsa Craig,<sup>1</sup>  
 Ha, ha, &c.

Duncan sighed baith out and in,  
 Grat his een baith bleart and blin',  
 Spak o' lowpin' ower a linn ;  
 Ha, ha, &c.

wegit

Time and chance are but a tide,  
 Ha, ha, &c. ;

Slighted love is sair to bide,  
 Ha, ha, &c.

Shall I, like a fool, quoth he,  
 For a haughty hizzie die ?  
 She may gae to—France for me !  
 Ha, ha, &c.

jade

How it comes let doctors tell,  
 Ha, ha, &c. ;

Meg grew sick—as he grew heal,  
 Ha, ha, &c.

Something in her bosom wrings,  
 For relief a sigh she brings ;  
 And oh, her een, they spak sic things !  
 Ha, ha, &c.

Duncan was a lad o' grace,  
 Ha, ha, &c. ;

Maggie's was a piteous case,  
 Ha, ha, &c.

Duncan couldna be her death,  
 Swelling pity smooored his wrath ;  
 Now they're crouse and canty baith ;  
 Ha, ha, &c.

The foregoing I submit, my dear air, to your better judgment. Acquit them or condemn them as seemeth good in your sight. *Duncan Gray* is that kind of light-horse gallop of an air which precludes sentiment. The ludicrous is its ruling feature.

*Auld Rob Morris* was written by Burns on the basis of a rude old ditty which appears in *Johnson's Museum*, and of which he

<sup>1</sup> A well-known rocky islet in the Firth of Clyde.

retained only the two initial lines. The second stanza was designed as a description of Charlotte Hamilton. So Burns himself told Miss Dunlop, who communicated the fact to Major Adair, Charlotte's son, who again is my informant.

*Duncan Gray* is likewise composed on the basis, and to the tune, of a rude old song in *Johnson's Museum*, the name of the hero being alone retained.

The first eighteen months of Burns's life in Dumfries present him as occupying a very small dwelling on the first floor of the house in the Wee Vennel (now Bank Street.) He has three small apartments, each with a window to the street, besides perhaps a small kitchen in the rear. The small central room, about the size of a bed-closet, is the only place he has in which to seclude himself for study. On the ground-floor immediately underneath, his friend John Syme has his office for the distribution of stamps. Over head is an honest blacksmith called George Haugh, whom Burns treats on a familiar footing as a neighbour. On the opposite side of the street is the poet's landlord, Captain Hamilton, a gentleman of fortune and worth, who admires Burns, and often asks him to a family Sunday dinner. The Nith rolls within a hundred yards, but it is not here a shining, pebbly stream, as at Ellisland, with green, broomy banks, but a sluggish tidal river, admitting of small craft from Cumberland and Liverpool. It was professionally a busy time with Burns; so much so, that one would have thought he had little time for dissipation. Nevertheless, he did not escape the snare.

Dumfries was then a great stage on the road from England to the north of Ireland; the Caledonian Hunt occasionally honoured it with their meetings; and the county gentlemen were necessarily often within its walls. Its hotels were consequently well frequented; and when a party of strangers found themselves assembled there, with no other means of passing an evening, they were very apt to make an effort to obtain the company of Burns, the brilliant intellectual prodigy of whom fame spoke so loudly. Now it certainly was a most unreasonable thing for such persons to expect that they were to draw Burns away from his humble home, and his wife and little ones, to bestow his time, strength, and spirits merely for the amusement of a set of people whom he probably never saw before and was never to see again. Equally absurd was it for Burns to yield to such invitations, and render himself up a voluntarily-enslaved Samson to make sport for such a set of Philistines. Yet so it is, that gentlemen, or what were called such in those days, would send messages for Burns, bidding him come to the 'King's Arms,' the 'George,' or the 'Globe,' as it might be, and there drink with them. And equally true it is,

though most lamentable, that Burns did not feel called upon by any principle, either of respect to himself or regard for his gentle wife and innocent children, to reject these unworthy invitations. Sure was he to answer on the spur of the moment in some such good-humoured terms as these—

The king's most humble servant, I  
Can scarcely spare a minute;  
But I'll be with you by and by,  
Or else the devil's in it.

And sure was he in time to make his appearance before the strangers, meditating at first of course only a social hour, but certain to be detained for hour after hour, till perhaps the cock had given his first, if not his second accusing crow.

According to all accounts, it was not a love of debauchery for its own sake that rendered Burns the victim of this system. Nor can we doubt that he felt himself in error in giving way to such temptations. Why, then, could he not resist them? Need we answer that the first grand cause was his social, fervent temperament, his delight in that ideal abnegation of the common selfish policy of the world which arises amongst boon-companions over the bowl? He could not but know the hollowness of convivial friendship; yet he could not resist the pleasing deceit. Burns, moreover, though a pattern of modesty amongst poets, was not by any means so insensible to flattery as his more ardent admirers would in general represent him. He would have been more than mortal if he had been beyond all sensibility to distinction on account of his extraordinary intellect. Notwithstanding, then, his great pride, and the powerful self-assertion which he had sometimes shewn, he certainly felt no small pleasure in being so signalised by these gentlemen strangers, and in seeing himself set up amongst them as a luminary. It was the ready compensation for that equality with common functionaries, and that condemnation to a constant contact with the vulgar, in which his professional fate condemned him to spend the most of his time. A vigorous will might have saved him from falling under this influence; but here again our poet was sadly deficient. And yet he was occasionally sensible that his course was a wrong one. Of this there is proof in a very interesting anecdote preserved by the family of his neighbour, George Haugh. One summer morning, this worthy citizen had risen somewhat earlier than usual to work: Burns soon after came up to his shop-door, on his way home from a debauch in the 'King's Arms.' The poet, though excited by the liquor he had drunk, addressed his neighbour in a sufficiently collected manner. 'O George,' said he, 'you are a happy man; you have risen from a refreshing sleep,

and left a kind wife and children, while I am returning a self-condemned wretch to mine.' And yet he would go sinning on.

Clarinda's visit to the West Indies had proved unfortunate. Her husband received her coldly; his temper was insupportably bad; and she was mortified to find how grossly unfaithful he had been during the period of their separation. She was at the same time admonished by the state of her health, that she could not expect long to bear the effects of a warm climate. She therefore returned to Scotland in August, and recommenced that quiet course of life which sustained no further interruption till her death—an event postponed to take place amidst a different generation. In consequence, probably, of the weakened state to which she was reduced by her voyage, she did not immediately write to Burns. The bard addressed two letters to her friend, Mary Peacock, inquiring after the quondam 'mistress of his soul;' but they unfortunately miscarried. He had concluded to write no more, when that sensibility to anniversaries which he had already shewn in the case of Highland Mary, overthrew his resolution. He remembered the parting of the 6th of December in the past year, with its anguished outburst: 'Had we never loved *ae* kindly,' and penned a third brief epistle to the young lady.

TO MISS MARY PEACOCK.

Dec. 6, 1792.

DEAR MADAM—I have written so often to you and have got no answer, that I had resolved never to lift up a pen to you again; but this eventful day, *the sixth of December*, recalls to my memory such a scene! Heaven and earth! when I remember a far-distant person!—but no more of this until I learn from you a proper address, and why my letters have lain by you unanswered, as this is the third I have sent you. The opportunities will be all gone now, I fear, of sending over the book I mentioned in my last. Do not write me for a week, as I shall not be at home, but as soon after that as possible.

Once mair I hail thee, thou gloomy December,  
 Once mair I hail thee wi' sorrow and care;  
 Dire was the parting thou bids me remember,  
 Parting wi' Nancy, oh, ne'er to meet mair!

Yours,

R. B.<sup>1</sup>

It appears from this letter that the return of Mrs M'Lehose in the preceding August was as yet unknown to Burns. We shall speedily see the subject revived; but in the meantime sterner matters call for attention.

<sup>1</sup> This letter first appeared in Pickering's edition of Burns's Poems.

A most eventful year was now drawing to a close. In France, under the threatened interference of the German states and the *émigrés*, moderation and constitutionalism had been forced to give way before wild democracy; the king was a prisoner, threatened with capital punishment; the blood of thousands of loyalists had been shed without form of law in Paris; a republic was established, threatening with the aid of its victorious arms to revolutionise other countries. We have seen that in February scarcely any apprehension was felt for either the contagion of French politics or the possibility of war. A rapid change had taken place during the year. Paine's *Essay on the Rights of Man*, and other publications believed to be of a seditious tendency, had appeared. In the course of summer, societies taking the name of *Friends of the People* were established in many parts of the empire, manifesting only a desire of 'stemming the torrent of corruption,' and bringing about 'a redress of real grievances,' calling for as specific measures 'a full, free, and equal representation of the people,' and a shortening of the duration of parliaments—carefully disclaiming all extreme and dangerous courses, and professing to seek by timely reform the permanence of the ancient institutions of the country—yet felt by those in the management of affairs, and by the great bulk of the influential classes, to be, in their practical bearing on the time, of evil omen to the peace of society. Such societies were supported by a mere handful of men above the vulgar; and the general feeling in England was one of good affection towards the reigning sovereign and the institutions of the country. Indeed, Paine himself had been mobbed at Dover; and disloyal men generally found themselves by no means in favour with the public. Nevertheless, towards the close of the year the government became seriously uneasy about seditious publications and seditious practices and opinions. It was now contemplating hostilities against the French, on the ostensible ground of their infraction of the rights of the Dutch in the opening of the Scheldt, but in reality for the purpose of repelling, and, if possible, extinguishing, a spirit which was felt to be dangerous to all altars and all thrones. A sound spirit in its own officers of all grades and services might well in such circumstances be felt of importance.

Burns had continued to sympathise with the French, notwithstanding all blots in their reforming career. He did not hesitate in company to express an unfavourable opinion of the warlike policy about to be adopted by the English ministry, and to avow his persevering desire of those reforms which had long been demanded by the Whig party. He would even, in the heat of discourse, denounce public men in terms far less remarkable for

their justice than their vehemence and severity. It does not appear that he had gone the length of openly joining any of the affiliated societies called Friends of the People; but his other demonstrations were sufficiently imprudent. As an example:—a paper called the *Gazetteer* had been started in Edinburgh by a gentleman named Captain Johnstone, for the purpose of advocating the reforming views. Now Johnstone was so noted as a reformer, that at an aggregate meeting or convention of representatives from the different societies, which took place in James's Court, Edinburgh, on the 22d of November, he being observed in the room, was unanimously called to take the chair, which, however, he declined doing. A few months afterwards he was imprisoned by the authorities, as was likewise the succeeding editor of the *Gazetteer*. I have heard even the printer—who, by the by, had been an honest Jacobite—tell how his being concerned in this ill-odoured paper stepped his credit at banks and made him a marked man, till his entering a loyal volunteer regiment in some degree restored his good name. Burns, like Willie Gairlace and his friends in Hector McNeill's poem, '*gat the Gazetteer*;' and these were the terms in which he ordered it:

TO CAPTAIN JOHNSTONE.

DUMFRIES, Nov. 13, 1792.

SIR—I have just read your prospectus of the *Edinburgh Gazetteer*. If you go on in your paper with the same spirit, it will, beyond all comparison, be the first composition of the kind in Europe. I beg leave to insert my name as a subscriber, and if you have already published any papers, please send me them from the beginning. Point out your own way of settling payments in this place, or I shall settle with you through the medium of my friend, Peter Hill, bookseller in Edinburgh.

Go on, sir! Lay bare with undaunted heart and steady hand that horrid mass of corruption called politics and state-craft. Dare to draw in their native colours those—

'Calm-thinking villains whom no faith can fire,'

whatever be the shibboleth of their pretended party.

The address to me at Dumfries will find, sir, your very humble servant,

ROBERT BURNS.

Whether this letter was ever seen by any emissary of power it is not likely that the fact of Burns getting the *Gazetteer* was unobserved in Dumfries. I would not assert that that fact for certain operated to his disadvantage; but when I remember that, so lately as 1817, an emissary of the Lord Advocate traced out the subscribers to a liberal newspaper then started in Edinburgh

—the first that could obtain a footing after the *Gazetteer*—I must admit that, if the fact was known, it could not fail, as being an overt tangible act on his part, to draw down upon him the displeasure of those who trembled for the safety of the national institutions. At anyrate we see in it the tendency of Burns's mind regarding the fearful questions at this time agitating the public, and the degree of fervour with which he allowed himself to speak even to those in whose prudence he had no reason to place confidence. It is to be feared also that he gave voice to some of his feelings in the form which was the most apt to give them currency, and thus expose their author. From the allusions, it seems highly probable that he at this time threw off the following song complimentary to the leaders of the reforming party in the House of Commons :—

HERE'S A HEALTH TO THEM THAT'S AWA.

TUNE—*Here's a Health to them that's awa.*

Here's a health to them that's awa,  
 Here's a health to them that's awa;  
 And wha winna wish guid luck to our cause,  
 May never guid luck be their fa'!  
 It's guid to be merry and wise,  
 It's guid to be honest and true,  
 It's guid to support Caledonia's cause,  
 And bide by the buff and the blue.

Here's a health to them that's awa,  
 Here's a health to them that's awa;  
 Here's a health to Charlie<sup>1</sup> the chief o' the clan,  
 Although that his band be sma'.  
 May liberty meet wi' success!  
 May prudence protect her frae evil!  
 May tyrants and tyranny tine in the mist,  
 And wander their way to the devil!

Here's a health to them that's awa,  
 Here's a health to them that's awa;  
 Here's a health to Tammie,<sup>2</sup> the Nerland laddie,  
 That lives at the lug o' the law!  
 Here's freedom to him that wad read,  
 Here's freedom to him that wad write!  
 There's nane ever feared that the truth should be heard,  
 But they wham the truth wad indite.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Charles James Fox. Buff and blue formed his well-known livery at the Westminster elections, and came to be an ensign of the Whig party generally.

<sup>2</sup> The Hon. Thomas Erskine, afterwards Lord Erskine.

<sup>3</sup> For *indite*, a Scotch law-phrase meaning accuse.



Here's a health to them that's awa,  
 Here's a health to them that's awa;  
 Here's Chieftain M'Leod, a chieftain worth gowd,<sup>1</sup>  
 Though bred amang mountains o' snaw!  
 Here's friends on both sides of the Forth,  
 And friends on both sides of the Tweed;  
 And wha wad betray old Albion's rights,  
 May they never eat of her bread.

Verily, if such a song as this, known to be from the pen of Burns, came under the eye of authority about the close of the year 1792, it could not fail to obtain for him distinction of a certain kind.

On the 6th of December we find Burns, in a letter to Mrs Dunlop, alluding to his sentiments on public affairs as of the Opposition complexion, but stating that the sense of his situation made him cautious in the expression of them.

#### TO MRS DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, 6th December 1792.

I SHALL be in Ayrshire, I think, next week; and, if at all possible, I shall certainly, my much-esteemed friend, have the pleasure of visiting at Dunlop House.

Alas, madam, how seldom do we meet in this world, that we have reason to congratulate ourselves on accessions of happiness! I have not passed half the ordinary term of an old man's life, and yet I scarcely look over the obituary of a newspaper that I do not see some names that I have known, and which I and other acquaintances little thought to meet with there so soon. Every other instance of the mortality of our kind makes us cast an anxious look into the dreadful abyss of uncertainty, and shudder with apprehension for our own fate. But of how different an importance are the lives of different individuals! Nay, of what importance is one period of the same life more than another! A few years ago I could have lain down in the dust, 'careless of the voice of the morning;' and now not a few, and these most helpless individuals, would, on losing me and my exertions, lose both their 'staff and shield.' By the way, these helpless ones have lately got an addition: Mrs B. having given

<sup>1</sup> M'Leod of Dunvegan, Isle of Skye, at this time M.P. for the county of Inverness. At the James's Court meeting above alluded to, M'Leod made a speech in which he declared his unalterable determination to support and prosecute the reforming objects which the society had in view, for which a unanimous vote of thanks was tendered to him.

me a fine girl since I wrote you.<sup>1</sup> There is a charming passage in Thomson's *Edward and Eleanora* :

'The valiant, in *himself*, what can he suffer?  
Or what need he regard his *single* woes?'—&c.

As I am got in the way of quotations, I shall give you another from the same piece, peculiarly—alas! too peculiarly—apposite, my dear madam, to your present frame of mind—

'Who so unworthy but may proudly deck him  
With his fair-weather virtue, that exalts  
Glad o'er the summer main? The tempest comes,  
The rough winds rage aloud; when from the helm  
This virtue shrinks, and in a corner lies  
Lamenting. Heavens! if privileged from trial,  
How cheap a thing were virtue!'

I do not remember to have heard you mention Thomson's dramas. I pick up favourite quotations, and store them in my mind as ready armour, offensive or defensive, amid the struggle of this turbulent existence. Of these is one, a very favourite one, from his *Alfred* :

'Attach thee firmly to the virtuous deeds  
And offices of life; to life itself,  
With all its vain and transient joys, sit loose.'

Probably I have quoted some of these to you formerly, as indeed, when I write from the heart, I am apt to be guilty of such repetitions. The compass of the heart, in the musical style of expression, is much more bounded than that of the imagination, so the notes of the former are extremely apt to run into one another; but in return for the paucity of its compass, its few notes are much more sweet. I must still give you another quotation, which I am almost sure I have given you before, but I cannot resist the temptation. The subject is religion: speaking of its importance to mankind, the author says—

'Tis this, my friend, that streaks our morning bright,' &c.

I see you are in for double postage, so I shall e'en scribble out t'other sheet. We in this country here have many alarms of the reforming, or rather the republican spirit of your part of the kingdom. Indeed we are a good deal in commotion ourselves. For me, I am a placeman, you know; a very humble one indeed, Heaven knows, but still so much as to gag me. What my private sentiments are you will find out without an interpreter.

I have taken up the subject, and the other day, for a pretty actress's benefit night, I wrote an Address, which I will give on the other page, called *The Rights of Woman*.

I shall have the honour of receiving your criticisms in person at Dunlop.

R. B.

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Riddel, born, as has been mentioned, on the 21st November,

Burns did visit Ayrshire, and spent four days with Mrs Dunlop. He appears to have been utterly unconscious of any impending evil. At this very time, however, some information regarding his political opinions, if not acts, was on its way to the Board of Excise, and a cloud was about to burst on his head.

TO R. GRAHAM, ESQ., FINTRY.

[December 1792.]

SIR—I have been surprised, confounded, and distracted by Mr Mitchell, the collector, telling me that he has received an order from your Board<sup>1</sup> to inquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to government.

Sir, you are a husband and a father. You know what you would feel to see the much-loved wife of your bosom, and your helpless, prattling little ones turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected, and left almost without the necessary support of a miserable existence. Alas! sir, must I think that such soon will be my lot! and from the d— dark insinuations of hellish, groundless envy too! I believe, sir, I may aver it, and in the sight of Omniscience, that I would not tell a deliberate falsehood, no, not though even worse horrors, if worse can be, than those I have mentioned, hung over my head; and I say, that the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a lie! To the British Constitution, on revolution principles, next after my God, I am most devoutly attached. You, sir, have been much and generously my friend—Heaven knows how warmly I have felt the obligation, and how gratefully I have thanked you. Fortune, sir, has made you powerful, and me impotent—has given you patronage, and me dependence. I would not, for my single self, call on your humanity; were such my insular, unconnected situation, I would despise the tear that now swells in my eye—I could brave misfortune, I could face ruin, for at the worst 'Death's thousand doors stand open;' but, good God! the tender concerns that I have mentioned, the claims and ties that I see at this moment, and feel around me, how they unnerve courage and wither resolution! To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your esteem, as an honest man, I know is my due. To these, sir, permit me to appeal; by these may I adjure you to save me from that misery which threatens to overwhelm me, and which—with my latest breath I will say it—I have not deserved.

R. B.

To think of this great poet having to say that the consideration of his wife and little ones unnerved courage and withered resolu-

<sup>1</sup> The Commissioners of the Scottish Board of Excise were at this time George Brown, Thomas Wharton, James Stodart, Robert Graham (of Fintry), and John Grieve, Esqrs.

tion in the braving of any indignity! There has been a dispute about the nature and extent of the trouble into which Burns fell on this occasion. His supervisor, Mr Alexander Findlater, who survived till 1839, expressed his conviction that a very slight hint of disapprobation or warning was alone given to Burns, because, had it been of a more serious nature, he must necessarily have been the channel through which it was communicated. In support of this affirmation is the fact ascertained by Mr Lockhart, that no notice of a reprimand to Burns appears in the records of the Board of Excise. To the same effect is the trivial notice taken of the matter by the poet a few days after, in a letter to Mrs Dunlop, as well as the little reference made to it by him at any subsequent time. All this would make it seem that Burns, in his letter to Mr Graham, expressed an unnecessary alarm and warmth of indignation. On the other hand, we shall see that the rumour of the day represented the unfortunate poet as dismissed from his situation for his political heterodoxy, and that the poet himself, in a letter which he wrote to Mr Erskine of Mar, in April 1793, stated that, but for Mr Graham's intercession, this dismissal would have taken place. With that fact before us, and remembering the character of the time, the jealousy of all men in power, and the sense they could not but have of the danger of Burns's hostility to government within the sphere of his personal influence, we cannot doubt that the affair was one of a serious character, calculated to sink deeply into the spirit of our poet, already sufficient at war with fortune and all circumstances, social and domestic.

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TO MRS DUNLOP.

DUMFRIES, 31st December 1792.

DEAR MADAM — A hurry of business, thrown in heaps by my absence, has until now prevented my returning my grateful acknowledgments to the good family of Dunlop, and you in particular, for that hospitable kindness which rendered the four days I spent under that genial roof four of the pleasantest I ever enjoyed. Alas, my dearest friend! how few and fleeting are these things we call pleasures! — on my road to Ayrshire I spent a night with a friend whom I much valued, a man whose days promised to be many; and on Saturday last we laid him in the dust!

Jan. 2d 1793.

I HAVE just received yours of the 30th, and feel much for your situation. However, I heartily rejoice in your prospect of recovery from that vile jaundice. As to myself, I am better, though not quite free of my complaint. You must not think, as you seem to

insinuate, that in my way of life I want exercise. Of that I have enough; but occasional hard drinking is the devil to me. Against this I have again and again bent my resolution, and have greatly succeeded. Taverns I have totally abandoned: it is the private parties in the family way, among the hard-drinking gentlemen of this country, that do me the mischief—but even this I have more than half given over.<sup>1</sup>

Mr Corbet can be of little service to me at present; at least I should be shy of applying. I cannot possibly be settled as a supervisor for several years. I must wait the rotation of the list; and there are twenty names before mine. I might, indeed, get a job of officiating where a settled supervisor was ill or aged; but that hauls me from my family, as I could not remove them on such an uncertainty. Besides, some envious, malicious devil has raised a little demur on my political principles, and I wish to let that matter settle before I offer myself too much in the eye of my supervisors. I have set, henceforth, a seal on my lips as to these unlucky politics; but to you I must breathe my sentiments. In this, as in everything else, I shall shew the undisguised emotions of my soul. War I deprecate: misery and ruin to thousands are in the blast that announces the destructive demon. \* \* \* \* R. B.

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TO THE SAME.<sup>2</sup>

5th January 1793.

You see my hurried life, madam; I can only command starts of time: however I am glad of one thing—since I finished the other

<sup>1</sup> The following extract from a letter addressed by Mr Bloomfield to the Earl of Buchan contains so interesting an exhibition of the modesty inherent in real worth, and so philosophical, and at the same time so poetical an estimate of the different characters and destinies of Burns and its author, that I should esteem myself culpable were I to withhold it from the public view:—

“The illustrious soul that has left amongst us the name of Burns has often been lowered down to a comparison with me; but the comparison exists more in circumstances than in essentials. That man stood up with the stamp of superior intellect on his brow—a visible greatness; and great and patriotic subjects would only have called into action the powers of his mind, which lay inactive while he played calmly and exquisitely the pastoral pipe.

“The letters to which I have alluded in my preface to the *Rural Tales* were friendly warnings, pointed with immediate reference to the fate of that extraordinary man. “Remember Burns!” has been the watchword of my friends. I do remember Burns; but I *owe* not Burns!—neither have I his fire to fan or to quench, nor passions to control! Where, then, is my merit if I make a peaceful voyage on a smooth sea, and with no mutiny on board? To a lady—I have it from herself—who remonstrated with him on his danger from drink, and the pursuits of some of his associates, he replied: “Madam, they would not thank me for my company if I did not drink with them. I must give them a slice of my constitution.” How much to be regretted that he did not give them thinner slices of his constitution, that it might have lasted longer!”—CROMEX.

<sup>2</sup> In Dr Currie's edition this letter is dated January 1792, and appears in the place appropriate to that date. The present editor, entertaining no doubt that the real date is 1793, has transferred it from the former to the present place. What gives reason to believe the latter the true date is the allusion to the ‘political blast’ that had threatened the poet's welfare.

sheet the political blast that threatened my welfare is overblown. I have corresponded with Commissioner Graham—for the Board had made me the subject of their animadversions; and now I have the pleasure of informing you that all is set to rights in that quarter. Now as to these informers, may the devil be let loose, to ——. But, hold! I was praying most fervently in my last sheet, and I must not so soon fall a-swearing in this.

Alas! how little do the wantonly or idly officious think what mischief they do by their malicious insinuations, indirect impertinence, or thoughtless blabbings. What a difference there is in intrinsic worth, candour, benevolence, generosity, kindness—in all the charities and all the virtues—between one class of human beings and another. For instance, the amiable circle I so lately mixed with in the hospitable hall of Dunlop, their generous hearts, their uncontaminated dignified minds, their informed and polished understandings—what a contrast when compared—if such comparing were not downright sacrilege—with the soul of the miscreant who can deliberately plot the destruction of an honest man that never offended him, and with a grin of satisfaction see the unfortunate being, his faithful wife, and prattling innocents, turned over to beggary and ruin.<sup>1</sup>

Your cup, my dear madam, arrived safe. I had two worthy fellows dining with me the other day, when I with great formality produced my whigmaleerie cup, and told them that it had been a family-piece among the descendants of William Wallace. This roused such an enthusiasm that they insisted on bumping the punch round in it; and by and by never did your great ancestor lay a *authron* more completely to rest than for a time did your cup my two friends. Apropos, this is the season of wishing. May God bless you, my dear friend, and bless me, the humblest and sincerest of your friends, by granting you yet many returns of the season! May all good things attend you and yours, wherever they are scattered over the earth!

R. B.

<sup>1</sup> Mr Gilbert Burns, speaking of such a crisis, says that on the side of the government will be found ranged a great part of the wise and prudent; 'but on that side also will be found a great host of a very different description—all the satellites of power and the parasites of greatness, with all the worthless and detestable crew of time-serving and officious informers. At such times loyalty comes to be esteemed the cardinal virtue, capable of "hiding a multitude of sins;" and many who are conscious how worthless and hollow-hearted they are, seek to piece up their reputation, and ingratiate themselves with their superiors, by an extraordinary display of loyalty and attachment to the existing order of things, and a virtuous zeal in hunting down whoever has the audacity to question the conduct of men in power.

To persons of that description the imprudent poet had made himself peculiarly obnoxious by the unguarded freedom with which he expressed his opinions of the wonderful events then attracting the notice of every one; and their enmity was heightened by his unqualified expression, general and particular, of his contempt for such sycophantic characters. By such "*Loyal Nations*" was the conduct of our poet strictly watched, with the view of detecting every political transgression or private fault; every imprudence or failing was magnified and exaggerated to a frightful degree; and the public alarm which brought such characters into contact with the respectable orders of society, procured the admission and circulation of these injurious reports in such circles as made them be received without suspicion.'

So lately as the 2d of the month, our poet had told Mrs Dunlop that he had of late 'greatly succeeded' in giving up hard drinking. Since then, perhaps on that same evening, he had had two worthy fellows dining with him, and, producing an old family cup which had been presented to him by Mrs Dunlop, he had set it into such active operation, as to lay his guests prostrate. Such are the rapid strides of Burns from profession to the opposite kind of practice. So soon, too, does he forget the indignity of the inquiry into his political conduct. Well might he liken himself, as he often did, to an *ignis fatuus*. The merry-making in question is very likely identical with one which has been heard of from a clerical acquaintance of Burns. The bard, not being on good terms with the parish clergy, and no great favourite at this time with any of the cloth, had still retained the friendship of one, who has been described as a most worthy as well as able man, but not much of a clergyman, the Rev. Mr M'Morine of Caerlaverock. Meeting this gentleman in Dumfries on a market-day, when the country clergy usually came to town to hear the news, he had engaged him to come next forenoon to baptise his recently born infant; and Mr M'Morine came accordingly, but at an earlier hour than was perhaps expected. On being shewn into Burns's parlour, he found a party composed of the poet and two companions, who had evidently sat down the previous evening. The description which the clergyman gave of the two visitors corresponds exactly with what Burns hints at in his account of the effects of the cup. The poet seemed taken by surprise, but in perfect possession of himself, and he very quickly put matters in decent order for the performance of the intended ceremony. It may be remarked that Mr M'Morine, though he clung to Burns's friendship when all the other clergy of the district looked coldly on him, used to relate the story with an unfavourable leaning towards the poet. He both was shocked by the idea of so prolonged a debauch, and thought meanly of the appearance of the two guests. Now, if the circumstances be identical, we see that Burns had reason to regard the men as 'worthy fellows,' and there was a special feeling about the *Wallace cup* which had operated in promoting the conviviality, not to speak of the recognised licence of the season, the date being apparently the second day of the new year.<sup>1</sup> Many other things which have been related unfavourably to Burns might prove

<sup>1</sup> What greatly confirms our supposition of this being the affair alluded to by Mr M'Morine is that the 2d of January was a Wednesday, the Dumfries market-day. Burns had written to Mrs Dunlop on that forenoon. The cup afterwards arrived. In the evening, he had the two worthy fellows dining with him. Mr M'Morine came next morning, the 3d, and on Saturday, the 5th, the poet speaks of the circumstances in a new letter to Mrs Dunlop.

susceptible of a similar explanation if we knew the whole of the connected facts.

## BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

## SONG.

TUNE—*Could Kail in Aberdeen.*<sup>1</sup>

O poortith cauld, and restless love,  
Ye wreck my peace between ye;  
Yet poortith a' I could fergive,  
An 'twere na for my Jeanie.  
O why should Fate sic pleasure have,  
Life's dearest bands untwining?  
Or why sae sweet a flower as love,  
Depend on Fortune's shining?

This world's wealth, when I think on  
Its pride, and a' the lave o't;  
Fie, fie on silly coward man  
That he should be the slave o't!  
O why, &c.

Het een sae bonnie blue betray  
How she repays my passion;  
But prudence is her o'erword aye,  
She talks of rank and fashion.  
O why, &c.

O wha can prudence think upon,  
And sic a lassie by him?  
O wha can prudence think upon,  
And sae in love as I am!  
O why, &c.

How blest the humble cotter's fate!<sup>2</sup>  
He wooes his simple dearie;  
The silly bogles, wealth and state,  
Can never make them eerie.  
O why, &c.

<sup>1</sup> This song is usually sung to the tune of *I had a Horse, I had nae mair.*

<sup>2</sup> In the original manuscript, 'How blest the wild-wood Indian's fate.'



GALA WATER.<sup>1</sup>

There's braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,  
That wander through the blooming heather;  
But Yarrow braes, nor Ettrick shaws,  
Can match the lads o' Gala Water.

But there is ane, a secret ane,  
Aboon them a' I lee him better;  
And I'll be his and he'll be mine,  
The bonnie lad o' Gala Water.

Although his daddie was nae laird,  
And though I hae na meikle tocher;  
Yet rich in kindest, truest love,  
We'll tent our flocks by Gala Water.

It ne'er was wealth, it ne'er was wealth,  
That coft contentment, peace, or pleasure;  
The bands and bliss o' mutual love,  
O that's the chiefest world's treasure!

Jan. 1783.

MANY returns of the season to you, my dear sir. How comes on your publication!—will these two foregoing be of any service to you? I should like to know what songs you print to each tune, besides the verses to which it is set. In short, I would wish to give you my opinion on all the poetry you publish. You know it is my trade, and a man in the way of his trade may suggest useful hints

<sup>1</sup> Some years before composing the present beautiful song, Burns had given to the *Scots Musical Museum* the following improved version of the original homely ballad—which, it may be mentioned, referred not to the lads, but to a lass of Gala Water:—

Braw, braw lads of Gala Water;  
O braw lads of Gala Water;  
I'll kilt my coats aboon my knee,  
And follow my love through the water  
Sae fair her hair, sae brent her brow,  
Sae bonnie blue her een, my dearie;  
Sae white her teeth, sae sweet her mou';  
The mair I kiss she's aye my dearie.  
O'er yon bank and o'er yon brae,  
O'er yon moss among the heather;  
I'll kilt my coats aboon my knee,  
And follow my love through the water.  
Down among the broom, the broom,  
Down among the broom, my dearie,  
The lassie lost her silken snood,  
That cost her mae a blirt and blear ee.

that escape men of much superior parts and endowments in other things.

If you meet with my dear and much-valued Cunningham, greet him in my name with the compliments of the season. Yours, &c.

Mr Gilbert Burns, in his memoranda as to heroines, written for Mr Thomson, places opposite *Poorish Could*—‘A Miss Jane Blackstock, afterwards Mrs Whiter of Liverpool.’ In the manuscript, Mr Thomson makes a pencil-note in the margin. ‘These verses, I humbly think, have too much of uneasy and cold reflection for the air, which is pleasing and rather gay than otherwise.’ The letter having apparently been returned to Burns, he adds: ‘The objections are just, but I cannot make it better. The *stuff* won’t bear mending; yet for private reasons I should like to see it in print.’

## SONNET,

WRITTEN ON THE 25TH JANUARY 1793, THE BIRTHDAY OF THE AUTHOR, ON HEARING  
A THRUSH SING IN A MORNING WALK.

Sing on, sweet thrush, upon the leafless bough,  
Sing on, sweet bird, I listen to thy strain;  
See aged Winter, 'mid his surly reign,  
At thy blithe carol clears his furrowed brow.

So in lone Poverty's dominion drear,  
Sits meek Content with light unanxious heart;  
Welcomes the rapid moments, bids them part,  
Nor asks if they bring ought to hope or fear.

I thank thee, Author of this opening day!  
Thou whose bright sun now gilds yon orient skies!  
Riches denied, thy boon was purer joys,  
What wealth could never give nor take away!

Yet come, thou child of poverty and care,  
The mite high Heaven bestowed, that mite with thee I'll share.

MR THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 26th Jan. 1794.

You make me happy, my dear sir, and thousands will be happy to see the charming songs you have sent me. Many merry returns of the season to you, and may you long continue among the sons and daughters of Caledonia, to delight them and to honour yourself.

The four last songs with which you favoured me for *Auld Rob Morris*, *Duncan Gray*, *Gala Water*, and *Cauld Kail*, are admirable, Duncan is indeed a lad of grace, and his humour will endear him to everybody.

The distracted lover in *Auld Rob*, and the happy shepherdess in *Gala Water*, exhibit an excellent contrast: they speak from genuine feeling, and powerfully touch the heart.

The number of songs which I had originally in view was limited, but I now resolve to include every Scotch air and song worth singing; leaving none behind but mere gleanings, to which the publishers of *omnegatherum* are welcome. I would rather be the editor of a collection from which nothing could be taken away, than of one to which nothing could be added. We intend presenting the subscribers with two beautiful stroke-engravings, the one characteristic of the plaintive, and the other of the lively songs; and I have Dr Beattie's promise of an essay upon the subject of our national music, if his health will permit him to write it. As a number of our songs have doubtless been called forth by particular events, or by the charms of peerless damsels, there must be many curious anecdotes relating to them.

The late Mr Tytler of Woodhouselee, I believe, knew more of this than anybody; for he joined to the pursuits of an antiquary a taste for poetry, besides being a man of the world, and possessing an enthusiasm for music beyond most of his contemporaries. He was quite pleased with this plan of mine, for I may say it has been solely managed by me, and we had several long conversations about it when it was in embryo. If I could simply mention the name of the heroine of each song, and the incident which occasioned the verses, it would be gratifying. Pray, will you send me any information of this sort, as well with regard to your own songs as the old ones?

To all the favourite songs of the plaintive or pastoral kind will be joined the delicate accompaniments, &c. of Pleyel. To those of the comic and humorous class, I think accompaniments scarcely necessary; they are chiefly fitted for the conviviality of the festive board, and a tuneful voice, with a proper delivery of the words, renders them perfect. Nevertheless, to these I propose adding bass accompaniments, because then they are fitted either for singing, or for instrumental performance, when there happens to be no singer. I mean to employ our right-trusty friend Mr Clarke to set the bass to these, which he assures me he will do *con amore*, and with much greater attention than he ever bestowed on anything of the kind. But for this last class of airs I will not attempt to find more than one set of verses.

That eccentric bard, Peter Pindar, has started I know not how many difficulties about writing for the airs I sent to him, because of the peculiarity of their measure, and the trammels they impose on his flying Pegasus. I subjoin, for your perusal, the only one I have yet got from him, being for the fine air *Lord Gregory*. The Scots verses printed with that air are taken from the middle of an old

ballad, called *The Lass of Lochroyan*, which I do not admire.<sup>1</sup> I have set down the air therefore as a creditor of yours. Many of the Jacobite songs are replete with wit and humour—might not the best of these be included in our volume of comic songs?

## POSTSCRIPT.

FROM THE HON. ANDREW, ERSKINE.

MR THOMSON has been so obliging as to give me a perusal of your songs. *Highland Mary* is most enchantingly pathetic, and *Duncan Gray* possesses native genuine humour—'Spak o' lowpin' o'er a linn,' is a line of itself that should make you immortal. I sometimes hear of you from our mutual friend Cunningham, who is a most excellent fellow, and possesses above all men I know the charm of a most obliging disposition. You kindly promised me, about a year ago, a collection of your unpublished productions, religious and amorous. I know from experience how irksome it is to copy. If you will get any trusty person in Dumfries to write them over fair, I will give Peter Hill whatever money he asks for his trouble, and I certainly shall not betray your confidence. I am your hearty admirer,

ANDREW ERSKINE.

## BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

26th January 1793.

I APPROVE greatly, my dear sir, of your plans. Dr Beattie's essay will of itself be a treasure. On my part I mean to draw up an appendix to the Doctor's essay, containing my stock of anecdotes, &c. of our Scots songs. All the late Mr Tytler's anecdotes I have by me, taken down in the course of my acquaintance with him from his own mouth. I am such an enthusiast, that in the course of my several peregrinations through Scotland I made a pilgrimage to the individual spot from which every song took its rise—*Lockaber* and the *Braes of Ballenden* excepted. So far as the locality, either from the title of the air or the tenor of the song, could be ascertained, I have paid my devotions at the particular shrine of every Scots muse.

I do not doubt but you might make a very valuable collection of Jacobite songs; but would it give no offence? In the meantime, do not you think that some of them, particularly *The Sow's Tail to Geordie*, as an air, with other words, might be well worth a place in your collection of lively songs?

If it were possible to procure songs of merit, it would be proper to have one set of Scots words to every air, and that the set of words to which the notes ought to be set. There is a *naïveté*, a pastoral

<sup>1</sup> This ballad has since been printed in several collections. It is possessed of considerable merit.

simplicity, in a slight intermixture of Scots words and phraseology, which is more in unison—at least to my taste, and, I will add, to every genuine Caledonian taste—with the simple pathos or rustic sprightliness of our native music, than any English verses whatever.

The very name of Peter Pindar is an acquisition to your work.<sup>1</sup> His *Gregory* is beautiful. I have tried to give you a set of stanzas in Scots on the same subject, which are at your service. Not that I intend to enter the lists with Peter—that would be presumption indeed. My song, though much inferior in poetic merit, has, I think, more of the ballad simplicity in it.

#### LORD GREGORY.

O mirk, mirk is this midnight hour,  
And loud the tempest's roar;  
A waefu' wanderer seeks thy tower,  
Lord Gregory, ope thy door:

An exile frae her father's ha',  
And a' for loving thee;  
At least some pity on me shaw,  
If love it may na be.

Lord Gregory, mind'st thou not the grove  
By bonnie Irwine side,  
Where first I owned that virgin-love  
I lang, lang had denied!

How often didst thou pledge and vow  
Thou wad for aye be mine;  
And my fond heart, itsel' sae true,  
It ne'er mistrusted thine.

<sup>1</sup> The song of Dr Wolcot (Peter Pindar) on the same subject, is as follows:—

'Ah ope, Lord Gregory, thy door!  
A midnight wanderer sighs;  
Hard rush the rains, the tempests roar,  
And lightnings cleave the skies.'

'Who comes with we at this drear night—  
A pilgrim of the gloom?  
If she whose love did once delight,  
My cot shall yield her room.'

'Alas! thou heard'st a pilgrim mourn,  
That once was prized by thee;  
Think of the ring by yonder burn  
Thou gav'st to love and me.

'But should'st thou not poor Marion know,  
I'll turn my feet and part;  
And think the storms that round me blow  
Far kinder than thy heart.'

It is but doing justice to Dr Wolcot to mention that his song is the original. Mr Burns saw it, liked it, and immediately wrote the other on the same subject, which is derived from the old Scottish ballad of uncertain origin.—CURRIE.

Hard is thy heart, Lord Gregory,  
 And flinty is thy breast:  
 Thou dart of heaven that flashest by  
 O wilt thou give me rest!

Ye mastering thunders from above  
 Your willing victim see!  
 But spare and pardon my fause love,  
 His wrangs to Heaven and me!

Miss Peacock had answered Burns's letter of the 6th of December, giving him an account of the return of Mrs M'Lehose to Scotland, but apparently not encouraging him to renew his correspondence with that lady. The letter did not reach the hands of the poet for a considerable time, in consequence of an accident. When at length made aware that his Clarinda was once more in Edinburgh, he addressed her—and the letter is certainly very characteristic:

## TO CLARINDA.

I SUPPOSE, my dear madam, that by your neglecting to inform me of your arrival in Europe—a circumstance that could not be indifferent to me, as indeed no occurrence relating to you can—you meant to leave me to guess and gather that a correspondence I once had the honour and felicity to enjoy is to be no more. Alas! what heavy-laden sounds are these—'No more!' The wretch who has never tasted pleasure has never known wo; what drives the soul to madness is the recollection of joys that are 'no more!' But this is not language to the world: they do not understand it. But come, ye few—the children of Feeling and Sentiment!—ye whose trembling bosom-chorde-ache to unutterable anguish as recollection gushes on the heart!—ye who are capable of an attachment keen as the arrow of Death, and strong as the vigour of immortal being—come! and your ears shall drink a tale—But, hush! I must not, cannot tell it; agony is in the recollection, and frenzy in the recital!

But, madam, to leave the paths that lead to madness, I congratulate you on your return; and I hope that the precious health, which Miss P. tells me is so much injured, is restored or restoring. There is a fatality attends Miss Peacock's correspondence and mine. Two of my letters, it seems, she never received; and her last came while I was in Ayrshire, was unfortunately mislaid, and only found about ten days or a fortnight ago, on removing a desk of drawers.

I present you a book: may I hope you will accept of it. I daresay you will have brought your books with you. The fourth volume of the *Scots Songs* is published; I will presume to send it you. Shall I hear from you? But first hear me. No cold language—no prudential documents: I despise advice and scorn control. If you are not to

write such language, such sentiments as you know I shall wish, shall delight to receive, I conjure you, by wounded pride, by ruined peace by frantic, disappointed passion, by all the many ills that constitute that sum of human woes, a broken heart!!! — to me be silent for ever. \* \* \* \* R. B.

The pride of Burns, and that impatience under reproach which his pride dictated, are here strongly delineated. Clarinda would probably in reply revert to her former wish that Sylvander could have been brought 'to feel a little of genuine gospel humility.' Yet he was capable of the deepest self-humiliation—only it was necessary, for the development of the feeling, that no fellow-worm should presume to taunt, or even to advise him.

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TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

3d March 1793.

SINCE I wrote to you the last lugubrious sheet, I have not had time to write you farther. When I say that I had not time, that, as usual, means that the three demons, indolence, business, and ennui, have so completely shared my hours among them as not to leave me a five minutes' fragment to take up a pen in.

Thank Heaven, I feel my spirits buoying upwards with the renovating year. Now I shall in good earnest take up Thomson's songs. I daresay he thinks I have used him unkindly; and, I must own, with too much appearance of truth. Apropos, do you know the much-admired old Highland air called *The Sutor's Dochter*? It is a first-rate favourite of mine, and I have written what I reckon one of my best songs to it. I will send it to you as it was sung, with great applause, in some fashionable circles, by Major Robertson of Lude, who was here with his corps.

There is one commission that I must trouble you with. I lately lost a valuable seal, a present from a departed friend, which vexes me much.<sup>1</sup> I have gotten one of your Highland pebbles, which I fancy would make a very decent one, and I want to cut my armorial bearing on it: will you be so obliging as inquire what will be the expense of such a business? I do not know that my name is matriculated, as the heralds call it, at all, but I have invented arms for myself; so, you know, I shall be chief of the name, and, by courtesy of Scotland, will likewise be entitled to supporters. These, however, I do not intend having on my seal. I am a bit of a herald, and shall give you, *secundum artem*, my arms. On a field, azure, a holly-bush, seeded, proper, in base; a shepherd's pipe and crook, saltier-wise,

<sup>1</sup> Some of the earlier letters to Mr Thomson retain the impression of a small seal with the device, very characteristic of and suitable to our poet, of a heart transfix'd by cross darts.

also proper, in chief. On a wreath of the colours, a woodlark perching on a sprig of bay-tree, proper, for crest. Two mottoes: round the top of the crest, *Wood-notes wild*; at the bottom of the shield, in the usual place, *Better a wee bush than nae bield*.<sup>1</sup> By the shepherd's pipe and crook I do not mean the nonsense of painters of Arcadia, but a *stock and horn*, and a *club*, such as you see at the head of Allan Ramsay, in Allan's quarto edition of the *Gentle Shepherd*. By the by, do you know Allan?<sup>2</sup> He must be a man of very great genius. Why is he not more known? Has he no patrons!—or do 'Poverty's cold wind and crushing rain beat keen and heavy' on him? I once, and but once, got a glance of that noble edition of the noblest pastoral in the world; and dear as it was—I mean dear as to my pocket—I would have bought it, but I was told that it was printed and engraved for subscribers only. He is the *only* artist who has hit *genuine pastoral costume*. What, my dear Cunningham, is there in riches that they narrow and harden the heart so? I think, that were I as rich as the sun, I should be as generous as the day; but as I have no reason to imagine my soul a nobler one than any other man's, I must conclude that wealth imparts a birdlime quality to the possessor, at which the man in his native poverty would have revolted. What has led me to this is the idea of such merit as Mr Allan possesses, and such riches as a nabob or government contractor possesses, and why they do not form a mutual league. Let wealth shelter and cherish unprotected merit, and the gratitude and celebrity of that merit will richly repay it.

R. B.

## BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

20th March 1793.

MY DEAR SIR—The song prefixed [*Mary Morison*]<sup>3</sup> is one of my juvenile works. I leave it in your hands. I do not think it very remarkable, either for its merits or demerits. It is impossible—at least I feel it so in my stunted powers—to be always original, entertaining, and witty.

What is become of the list, &c. of your songs? I shall be out of all temper with you by and by. I have always looked on myself as the prince of indolent correspondents, and valued myself accordingly; and I will not, cannot, bear rivalry from you nor anybody else.

<sup>1</sup> A seal with these fanciful bearings was actually cut for the poet, and used by him for the remainder of his life. Its impression is represented under a profile of the poet in Mr Cunningham's edition of Burns, vol. viii. p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> The poet here alludes to David Allan, painter, usually called the Scottish Hogarth. He was born at Alloa in 1744, and educated through the kindness of some generous ladies. His serious paintings are not much admired; but he had a happy knack at hitting off Scottish rustic figures. At his death in 1796, he left a series of drawings illustrative of Burns's works.

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. I., p. 71. The song is here headed by the poet with a reference to the tune of *Duncan Davidson*. For this is substituted in Mr Thomson's hand, *Bide ye yet*. The song was adapted by the late John Wilson, vocalist, to the tune of *Merry may the Maid be*, which is certainly much more suitable.



## BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

March 1793.

## WANDERING WILLIE.

Here awa, there awa, wandering Willie,  
 Now tired with wandering, haud awa hame;  
 Come to my bosom, my ae only dearie,  
 And tell me thou bring'st me my Willie the same.

Loud blew the cauld winter winds at our parting,  
 It wasna the blast brought the tear in my ee;  
 Now welcome the simmer, and welcome my Willie,  
 The simmer to nature, my Willie to me.

Ye hurricanes rest in the cave of your slumbers,  
 O how your wild horrors a lover alarms!  
 Awaken, ye breezes! row gently, ye billows!  
 And waft my dear laddie ance mair to my arms!

But if he's forgotten his faithfulest Nannie,  
 O still flow between us, thou wide-roaring main!  
 May I never see it, may I never trow it,  
 But, dying, believe that my Willie's my ain!

I leave it to you, my dear sir, to determine whether the above, or  
 the old *Through the Lang Muir* be the best.

TO MISS BENSON.<sup>1</sup>

Dumfries, 21st March 1793.

MADAM—Among many things for which I envy these hale, long-lived old fellows before the Flood, is this, in particular—that when they met with anybody after their own heart, they had a charming long prospect of many, many happy meetings with them in after-life.

Now, in this short, stormy winter-day of our fleeting existence, when you, now and then, in the chapter of accidents, meet an individual whose acquaintance is a real acquisition, there are all the probabilities against you that you shall never meet with that valued character more. On the other hand, brief as this miserable being is, it is none of the least of the miseries belonging to it, that if there is any miscreant whom you hate, or creature whom you despise, the ill run of the chances shall be so against you, that in the overtakings, turnings, and jostlings of life, pop, at some unlucky corner eternally comes the wretch upon you, and will not allow your

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Mrs Basil Montagu.

indignation or contempt a moment's repose. As I am a sturdy believer in the powers of darkness, I take these to be the doings of that old author of mischief, the devil. It is well known that he has some kind of short-hand way of taking down our thoughts; and I make no doubt that he is perfectly acquainted with my sentiments respecting Miss Benson: how much I admired her abilities and valued her worth, and how very fortunate I thought myself in her acquaintance. For this last reason, my dear madam, I must entertain no hopes of the very great pleasure of meeting with you again.

Miss Hamilton tells me that she is sending a packet to you, and I beg leave to send you the enclosed sonnet; though, to tell you the real truth, the sonnet is a mere pretence, that I may have the opportunity of declaring with how much respectful esteem I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

Burns was acquainted with Mr Craik of Arbigland, through his friend and landlord, Captain Hamilton, a connection of the family. He had at Arbigland met Miss Benson, who was there on a visit. The lady has related the following anecdote of the occasion:

"I dined with Burns at Arbigland; he was witty, drank as others drank, and was long in coming to the tea-table. It was then the fashion for young ladies to be busy about something—I was working a flower. The poet sat down beside me, talked of the beauty of what I was imitating, and put his hand so near the work, that I said: "Well take it, and do a bit yourself." "O ho!" said he, "you think my hand is unsteady with wine. I cannot work a flower, madam; but"—he pulled the thread out of the needle, and re-threaded it in a moment. "Can a tipsy man do that?" He talked to me of his children, more particularly of his eldest son, and called him a promising boy. "And yet, madam," he said, with a sarcastic glance of his eye, "I hope he will turn out a glorious blockhead, and so make his fortune."—*Allan Cunningham's Life of Burns* (p. 267.)

The eldest son of the poet was now a boy between six and seven years old, and already noted for his aptitude to learn, being possessed of an extraordinary memory for facts, and no small portion of his father's gift of language. Burns, with a feeling hereditary in his case, was most laudably anxious about the education of his children. Finding that the really excellent school of Dumfries was patent at a lower scale of fees to the children of burgesses, he recalled that, at his first visit to the place in June 1767, he had been invested with an honorary burgess ticket, so that he was all but entitled to the privilege he thought so desirable for his offspring. He accordingly addressed the following application to the municipal authorities:

III.

N

TO THE HON. THE PROVOST, BAILIES, AND TOWN-COUNCIL OF  
DUMFRIES.

GENTLEMEN—The literary taste and liberal spirit of your good town has so ably filled the various departments of your schools, as to make it a very great object for a parent to have his children educated in them. Still to me, a stranger, to give my young ones that education I wish, at the high school-fees which a stranger pays, will bear hard upon me.

Some years ago, your good town did me the honour of making me an honorary burgess. Will you allow me to request that this mark of distinction may extend so far as to put me on the footing of a real freeman of the town in the schools?

If you are so very kind as to grant my request, it will certainly be a constant incentive to me to strain every nerve where I can officially serve you; and will, if possible, increase that grateful respect with which I have the honour to be, gentlemen, &c. R. B.

The request was immediately complied with, and young Robert Burns, with one or two of his brothers, were in the way of receiving an excellent education at little expense when their distinguished father died.

BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

OPEN THE DOOR TO ME, OH!

‘O open the door, some pity to shew,  
O open the door to me, oh!  
Though thou hast been false, I’ll ever prove true,  
O open the door to me, oh!

‘Cauld is the blast upon my pale cheek,  
But caulder thy love for me, oh!  
The frost that freezes the life at my heart,  
Is nought to my pains frae thee, oh!

‘The wan moon is setting behind the white wave,  
And time is setting with me, oh!  
False friends, false love, farewell! for mair  
I’ll ne’er trouble them, nor thee, oh!’

She has opened the door, she has opened it wide;  
She sees his pale corse on the plain, oh!  
‘My true love!’ she cried, and sank down by his side,  
Never to rise again, oh!

I do not know whether this song be really minded.

BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

YOUNG JESSIE.

TUNE—*Bonnie Dundee*.

True-hearted was he, the sad swain o' the Yarrow,  
 And fair are the maids on the banks o' the Ayr,  
 But by the sweet side o' the Nith's winding river,  
 Are lovers as faithful, and maidens as fair:  
 To equal young Jessie seek Scotland<sup>1</sup> all over;  
 To equal young Jessie you seek it in vain;  
 Grace, beauty, and elegance fether her lover,  
 And maidenly modesty fixes the chain.

O fresh is the rose in the gay dewy morning,  
 And sweet is the lily at evening close;  
 But in the fair presence o' lovely young Jessie  
 Unseen is the lily, unheeded the rose.  
 Love sits in her smile, a wizard ensnaring;  
 Enthroned in her een he delivers his law:  
 And still to her charms she alone is a stranger—  
 Her modest demeanour's the jewel of a'!

In this song Burns meant a compliment to Miss Janet Staig, second daughter of the Provost of Dumfries, and subsequently the wife of Major William Miller, one of the sons of the poet's former landlord. Mrs Miller must have now been a very young lady, for her monument in Dumfries churchyard states that she died in March 1801, at the early age of 26.

TO PATRICK MILLER, ESQ., OF DALSWINTON.

DUMFRIES, April 1783.

SIR—My poems having just come out in another edition, will you do me the honour to accept of a copy! A mark of my gratitude to you, as a gentleman to whose goodness I have been much indebted; of my respect for you, as a patriot who, in a venal, sliding age, stands forth the champion of the liberties of my country; and of my veneration for you, as a man whose benevolence of heart does honour to human nature.

There *was* a time, sir, when I was your dependent: this language *then* would have been like the vile incense of flattery—I could not

<sup>1</sup> Burns had written *Scotia*, which Mr Thomson altered to *Scotland*.

have used it. Now that that connection<sup>1</sup> is at an end, do me the honour to accept of this *honest* tribute of respect from, sir, your much indebted humble servant,  
R. B.

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TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ., DEUMLANRIG.

DUMFRIES, 1793.

WILL Mr M'Murdo do me the favour to accept of these volumes?<sup>2</sup> a trifling but sincere mark of the very high respect I bear for his worth as a man, his manners as a gentleman, and his kindness as a friend. However inferior now, or afterwards, I may rank as a poet, one honest virtue to which few poets can pretend, I trust I shall ever claim as mine—to no man, whatever his station in life, or his power to serve me, have I ever paid a compliment at the expense of TRUTH.

THE AUTHOR.

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TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

MY LORD—When you cast your eye on the name at the bottom of this letter, and on the title-page of the book I do myself the honour to send your lordship,<sup>3</sup> a more pleasurable feeling than my vanity tells me that it must be a name not entirely unknown to you. The generous patronage of your late illustrious brother found me in the lowest obscurity: he introduced my rustic muse to the partiality of my country; and to him I owe all. My sense of his goodness, and the anguish of my soul at losing my truly noble protector and friend, I have endeavoured to express in a poem to his memory, which I have now published. This edition is just from the press; and in my gratitude to the dead, and my respect for the living (fame belies you, my lord, if you possess not the same dignity of man, which was your noble brother's characteristic feature), I had destined a copy for the Earl of Glencairn. I learnt just now that you are in town: allow me to present it you.

I know, my lord, such is the vile, venal contagion which pervades the world of letters, that professions of respect from an author, particularly from a poet to a lord, are more than suspicious. I claim my by-past conduct, and my feelings at this moment, as exceptions to the too just conclusion. Exalted as are the honours of your lordship's name, and unnoted as is the obscurity of mine; with the uprightness of an honest man, I come before your lordship, with an offering, however humble, 'tis all I have to give, of my grateful

<sup>1</sup> Alluding to the time when he held the farm of Ellisland, as tenant to Mr Miller.

<sup>2</sup> A copy of the new edition of his poems. It was in two volumes.

<sup>3</sup> A copy of the new edition of his poems.

respect ; and to beg of you, my lord, 'tis all I have to ask of you, that you will do me the honour to accept of it. I have the honour to be,  
R. B.

## MR THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 2d April 1793.

I WILL not recognise the title you give yourself, 'the prince of indolent correspondents ;' but if the adjective were taken away, I think the title would then fit you exactly. It gives me pleasure to find you can furnish anecdotes with respect to most of the songs : these will be a literary curiosity.

I now send you my list of the songs, which I believe will be found nearly complete. I have put down the first lines of all the English songs which I propose giving in addition to the Scotch verses. If any others occur to you, better adapted to the character of the airs, pray mention them when you favour me with your strictures upon everything else relating to the work.

Pleyel has lately sent me a number of the songs, with his symphonies and accompaniments added to them. I wish you were here, that I might serve up some of them to you with your own verses, by way of dessert after dinner. There is so much delightful fancy in the symphonies, and such a delicate simplicity in the accompaniments—they are indeed beyond all praise.

I am very much pleased with the several last productions of your muse : your *Lord Gregory*, in my estimation, is more interesting than Peter's, beautiful as his is. Your *Here awa, Willie*, must undergo some alterations to suit the air. Mr Erskine and I have been conning it over ; he will suggest what is necessary to make them a fit match.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Wandering Willie*, as altered by Mr Erskine and Mr Thomson :—

Here awa, there awa, wandering Willie,  
Here awa, there awa, haud awa hame ;  
Come to my bosom, my ain only dearie,  
Tell me thou bring'st me my Willie the same.

Winter winds blew loud and caul' at our parting,  
Fears for my Willie brought tears in my ee ;  
Welcome now simmer, and welcome my Willie,  
As simmer to nature, so Willie to me.

Rest, ye wild storms, in the cave o' your slumbers,  
How your dread howling a lover alarms !  
Blow soft, ye breezes ! roll gently, ye billows !  
And waft my dear laddie anoe mair to my arms.

But oh, if he's faithless, and minds na his Nannie,  
Flow still between us, thou dark-heaving main !  
May I never see it, may I never trow it,  
While, dying, I think that my Willie's my ain.

<sup>1</sup> Our poet, with his usual judgment, adopted some of these alterations, and rejected others. The last edition is as follows :—

The gentleman I have mentioned, whose fine taste you are no stranger to, is so well pleased, both with the musical and poetical part of our work, that he has volunteered his assistance, and has already written four songs for it, which, by his own desire, I send for your perusal.

## BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN.<sup>1</sup>AIR—*The Mill, Mill O.*

When wild war's deadly blast was blawn,  
And gentle peace returning,  
Wi' mony a sweet babe fatherless,  
And mony a widow mourning :<sup>2</sup>

Here awa, there awa, wandering Willie,  
Here awa, there awa, haud awa hame ;  
Come to my bosom, my ain only dearie,  
Tell me thou bring'st me my Willie the same.

Winter winds blew loud and cauld at our parting,  
Fears for my Willie brought tears in my ee ;  
Welcome now simmer, and welcome my Willie,  
The simmer to nature, my Willie to me.

Rest, ye wild storms, in the cave of your slumbers,  
How your dread howling a lover alarms !  
Wauken, ye breezes ! row gently, ye billows !  
And waft my dear laddie ance mair to my arms !

But oh, if he's faithless, and minds na his Nannie,  
Flow still between us, thou wide-roaring main !  
May I never see it, may I never trow it,  
But, dying, believe that my Willie's my ain.

<sup>1</sup> Several of the alterations seem to be of little importance in themselves, and were adopted, it may be presumed, for the sake of suiting the words better to the music. The Homeric epithet for the sea, *dark-heaving*, suggested by Mr Erskine, is in itself more beautiful, as well perhaps as more sublime, than *wide-roaring*, which he has retained, but as it is only applicable to a placid state of the sea, or, at most, to the swell left on its surface after the storm is over, it gives a picture of that element not so well adapted to the ideas of eternal separation, which the fair mourner is supposed to imprecate. From the original song of *Here awa, Willie*, Burns has borrowed nothing but the second line and part of the first. The superior excellence of this beautiful poem will, it is hoped, justify the different editions of it which we have given.—CURRIE.

<sup>2</sup> Burns, I have been informed, was one summer evening at the inn at Brownhill with a couple of friends, when a poor wayworn soldier passed the window : of a sudden, it struck the poet to call him in, and get the story of his adventures ; after listening to which, he all at once fell into one of those fits of abstraction not unusual with him. He was lifted to the region where he had his "garland and singing robes about him," and the result was the admirable song which he sent you for *The Mill, Mill O.*—*Correspondent of Mr George Thomson.* Mill-Mannoch, a sweet pastoral scene on the Coyl, near Coylton Kirk, is supposed to have been the spot where the poet imagined the rencontre of the soldier and his mistress to have taken place.

<sup>3</sup> Variation.—'And eyes again with pleasure beamed,  
That had been bleared with mourning.'

I left the lines and tented field,  
 Where lang I'd been a lodger,  
 My humble knapsack a' my wealth,  
 A poor but honest sodger.

A leal, light heart was in my breast,  
 My hand unstained wi' plunder :  
 And for fair Scotia, hame again,  
 I cheery on did wander.  
 I thought upon the banks o' Coil,  
 I thought upon my Nancy ;  
 I thought upon the witching smile  
 That caught my youthful fancy.

At length I reached the bonnie glen  
 Where early life I sported ;  
 I passed the mill, and trysting thorn,  
 Where Nancy aft I courted :  
 Wha spied I bat my ain dear maid  
 Down by her mother's dwelling !  
 And turned me round to hide the flood  
 That in my een was swelling.

Wi' altered voice, quoth I, ' Sweet lass,  
 Sweet as yon hawthorn's blossom,  
 O happy, happy may he be,  
 That's dearest to thy bosom !  
 My purse is light, I've far to gang,  
 And fain would be thy lodger ;  
 I've served my king and country lang—  
 Take pity on a sodger ! '

Sae wistfully she gazed on me,  
 And lovelier was than ever ;  
 Quo' she, ' A sodger ance I loed,  
 Forget him shall I never :  
 Our humble cot and hamely fare  
 Ye freely shall partake o't ;  
 That gallant badge, the dear cockade,  
 Ye're welcome for the sake o't.'

She gazed—she reddened like a rose—  
 Syne pale like ony lily ;  
 She sank within my arms, and cried,  
 ' Art thou my ain dear Willie !'  
 ' By Him who made yon sun and sky,  
 By whom true love's regarded,  
 I am the man ; and thus may still  
 True lovers be rewarded.



The wars are o'er, and I'm come hame,  
 And find thee still true-hearted !  
 Though poor in gear, we're rich in love,  
 And mair we'se ne'er be parted.'  
 'Quo' she, ' My grandsire left me gowd,  
 A mailen plenished fairly ; farm  
 And come, my faithfu' sodger lad,  
 Thou'rt welcome to it dearly.'

For gold the merchant ploughs the main,  
 The farmer ploughs the manor ;  
 But glory is the sodger's prize,  
 The sodger's wealth is honour.  
 The brave poor sodger ne'er despise,  
 Nor count him as a stranger ;  
 Remember he's his country's stay  
 In day and hour of danger.

#### MEG O' THE MILL.

*Air—O Bonnie Lass, will you lie in a Barrack ?*

O ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has gotten !  
 And ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has gotten ?  
 She has gotten a coof wi' a claut o' siller, fool lump  
 And broken the heart o' the barley Miller.

The Miller was strappin', the Miller was ruddy ;  
 A heart like a lord, and a hue like a lady ;  
 The Laird was a widdiefu', bleerit knurl !<sup>1</sup>—  
 She's left the guidfellow and taen the churl.

The Miller he hecht her a heart leal and loving ; offered  
 The Laird did address her wi' matter more moving,  
 A fine pacing horse wi' a clear chainèd bridle,  
 A whip by her side, and a bonnie side-saddle.

O wae on the siller, it is sae prevailing !  
 And wae on the love that is fixed on a mailen !  
 A tocher's nae word in a true lover's parle,  
 But gie me my love, and a fig for the warl !<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A poor little creature.

<sup>2</sup> The poet had retouched an old song of this name for *Johnson's Museum* in 1788. It appeared in the sixth volume, as 'written for this work by Robert Burns,' but is so rude and wretched a production, that we cannot believe many words of it to have been supplied by so masterly a pen.

BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

7th April 1793.

THANK you, my dear sir, for your packet. You cannot imagine how much this business of composing for your publication has added to my enjoyments. What with my early attachment to ballads, your book, &c. ballad-making is now as completely my hobby-horse as ever fortification was Uncle Toby's; so I'll e'en canter it away till I come to the limit of my race—God grant that I may take the right side of the winning-post!—and then cheerfully looking back on the honest folks with whom I have been happy, I shall say or sing, *Sae Merry as we a' hae been!* and, raising my last looks to the whole human race, the last words of the voice of Coila<sup>1</sup> shall be, *Good-night, and Joy be wi' you a'!* So much for my last words: now for a few present remarks, as they have occurred at random, on looking over your list.

The first lines of *The Last Time I came o'er the Moor*, and several other lines in it, are beautiful; but, in my opinion—pardon me, revered shade of Ramsay!—the song is unworthy of the divine air. I shall try to make or mend. *For ever, Fortune, wilt thou prove*, is a charming song; but *Logan Burn and Logan Braes* is sweetly susceptible of rural imagery: I'll try that likewise, and if I succeed, the other song may class among the English ones. I remember the two last lines of a verse in some of the old songs of *Logan Water*—for I know a good many different ones—which I think pretty:—

'Now my dear lad maun face his fae,  
Fae, far frae me and Logan braes.'

*My Patie is a Lover gay*, is unequal. 'His mind is never muddy,' is a muddy expression indeed.

'Then I'll resign and marry Patie,  
And syne my cockernony'—

This is surely far unworthy of Ramsay, or your book. My song, *Rigs of Barley*, to the same tune, does not altogether please me; but if I can mend it, and thrash a few loose sentiments out of it, I will submit it to your consideration. *The Lass o' Patie's Mill* is one of Ramsay's best songs; but there is one loose sentiment in it, which my much-valued friend Mr Erskine will take into his critical consideration. In Sir John Sinclair's statistical volumes are two claims—one, I think, from Aberdeenshire, and the other from Ayrshire—for the honour of this song. The following anecdote, which I had from the present Sir William Cunningham of Robertland, who had it of the late John, Earl of Loudon, I can, on such authorities, believe:—

<sup>1</sup> Burns here calls himself the 'Voice of Coila,' in imitation of Ossian, who denominates himself the 'Voice of Cona.' *Sae Merry as we a' hae been!* and *Good-night, and Joy be wi' you a'!* are the names of two Scottish tunes.—OUR RITE.

Allan Ramsay was residing at Loudon Castle with the then Earl, father to Earl John; and one forenoon, riding or walking out together, his lordship and Allan passed a sweet, romantic spot on Irvine Water, still called Patie's Mill, where a bonnie lass was 'tedding hay, bareheaded, on the green.' My lord observed to Allan that it would be a fine theme for a song. Ramsay took the hint, and, lingering behind, he composed the first sketch of it, which he produced at dinner.

*One Day I heard Mary say*, is a fine song; but, for consistency's sake, alter the name Adonis. Were there ever such banns published as a purpose of marriage between Adonis and Mary! I agree with you that my song *There's naught but Care on every Hand*, is much superior to *Puirith Cauld*. The original song, *The Mill, Mill O!* though excellent, is, on account of delicacy, inadmissible; still I like the title, and think a Scottish song would suit the notes best; and let your chosen song, which is very pretty, follow as an English set. *The Banks of the Dee* is, you know, literally *Langolee*, to slow time. The song is well enough, but has some false imagery in it: for instance,

'And sweetly the nightingale sang from the tree.'

In the first place, the nightingale sings in a low bush, but never from a tree; and in the second place, there never was a nightingale seen or heard on the banks of the Dee, or on the banks of any other river in Scotland. Exotic rural imagery is always comparatively flat. If I could hit on another stanza, equal to 'The small birds rejoice,' &c. I do myself honestly avow that I think it a superior song.<sup>1</sup> *John Anderson, my Jo*—the song to this tune in *Johnson's Museum* is my composition, and I think it not my worst; if it suit you, take it, and welcome. Your collection of sentimental and pathetic songs is, in my opinion, very complete; but not so your comic ones. Where are *Tullochgorum*, *Lumps o' Puddin*, *Tibbie Fowler*, and several others, which, in my humble judgment, are well worthy of preservation? There is also one sentimental song of mine in the *Museum*, which never was known out of the immediate neighbourhood, until I got it taken down from a country girl's singing. It is called *Cragieburn Wood*, and, in the opinion of Mr Clarke, is one of the sweetest Scottish songs. He is quite an enthusiast about it; and I would take his taste in Scottish music against the taste of most connoisseurs.

You are quite right in inserting the last five in your list, though they are certainly Irish. *Shepherd, I have lost my Love!* is to me a heavenly air—what would you think of a set of Scottish verses to it? I have made one to it, a good while ago, which I think \* \* \*, but in its original state it is not quite a lady's song. I enclose an

<sup>1</sup> The bard did produce a second stanza of *The Chevalier's Lament* (to which he here alludes), worthy of the first.—CURRIE. See both verses in Vol. II. of the present work, page 260.

altered, not amended, copy for you, if you choose to set the tune to it, and let the Irish verses follow.<sup>1</sup>

Mr Erskine's songs are all pretty, but his *Lone Vale* is divine. Yours, &c.

Let me know just how you like these random hints.

Burns was not quite a silent and complying observer of the war carried on against the patriotic party in France.

When General Dumourier, after unparalleled victories, deserted the army of the Republic, April 5, 1793, only prevented by narrow accidents from betraying his troops into the hands of the enemy, some one expressing joy in the event where Burns was present, he chanted almost extempore the following verses, to the tune of *Robin Adair*:—

You're welcome to Despots, Dumourier ;  
 You're welcome to Despots, Dumourier.  
 How does Dampierre do !  
 Ay, and Beurnonville too !<sup>2</sup>  
 Why did they not come along with you, Dumourier !

<sup>1</sup> Mr Thomson, it appears, did not approve of this song, even in its altered state. It does not appear in the correspondence ; but it is probably one to be found in his manuscripts beginning

Yestreen I got a pint of wine,  
 A place where body saw na ;  
 Yestreen lay on this breast of mine  
 The gowden locks of Anna.  
 [The hungry Jew in wilderness,  
 Rejoicing o'er his manna,  
 Was naething to my hinny bliss  
 Upon the lips of Anna.

Ye monarchs tak the east and west,  
 Frae Indus to Savannah,  
 Gle me within my straining grasp  
 The melting form of Anna.  
 There I'll despise imperial charms,  
 An empress or sultana,  
 While dying raptures in her arms,  
 I give and take with Anna !

Awa, thou flaunting god o' day !  
 Awa, thou pale Diana !  
 Ilk star gae hide thy twinkling ray,  
 When I'm to meet my Anna.  
 Come, in thy raven plumage, night !  
 Sun, moon, and stars withdrawn a' ;  
 And bring an angel pen to write  
 My transports wif my Anna !]

It is highly characteristic of our bard, but the strain of sentiment does not correspond with the air to which he proposes it should be allied.—CURRIE.

<sup>2</sup> Dampierre was one of Dumourier's generals, whom he expected to desert along with him. Beurnonville was an emissary of the Convention, so much his friend that he had similar hopes of him, which, however, were disappointed. The latter person lived to figure in the crisis of the Restoration in 1814.

I will fight France with you, Dumourier ;  
 I will fight France with you, Dumourier ;  
 I will fight France with you,  
 I will take my chance with you ;  
 By my soul, I'll dance a dance with you, Dumourier.

Then let us fight about, Dumourier ;  
 Then let us fight about, Dumourier ;  
 Then let us fight about,  
 Till freedom's spark is out,  
 Then we'll be damned, no doubt—Dumourier.

As will be afterwards seen, there are other compositions of our imprudent bard, expressing ardent sympathy with the French, as against the powers banded for the suppression of the Republic. Nor could he always keep his tongue from betraying the sentiments of his heart. Thus, for instance, at a private dinner party, on the health of Mr Pitt being proposed, Burns called for a toast to Washington, as a much greater man, and was sullen because his request was not obeyed.

We now come to the remarkable letter which he wrote to Mr. Erskine of Mar, with reference to the late animadversions on his conduct by the Excise Board. Mr Erskine—grandson of the rebel earl of 1715, and himself subsequently restored to the family titles—was a zealous Whig. Like other men of wealth of that party, he thought himself bound to do all in his power to compensate for the severity with which the government was treating some of the humbler liberals. Having heard that Burns was dismissed from his situation, he wrote to Mr Riddel of Glenriddel, another of the notables in the recent movements for parliamentary reform, offering in that case to head a subscription in the poet's behalf. Burns consequently addressed Mr Erskine as follows :—

TO JOHN FRANCIS ERSKINE, ESQ., OF MAR.

DUMFRIES, 13th April 1793.

SIR—Degenerate as human nature is said to be—and in many instances worthless and unprincipled it is—still there are bright examples to the contrary ; examples that, even in the eyes of superior beings, must shed a lustre on the name of man.

Such an example have I now before me, when you, sir, came forward to patronise and befriend a distant obscure stranger, merely because poverty had made him helpless, and his British hardihood of mind had proved the arbitrary wantonness of power. My much-esteemed friend, Mr Riddel of Glenriddel, has just read me a paragraph of a letter he had from you. Accept, sir, of the silent throbb of gratitude ; for words would but mock the emotions of my soul.

You have been misinformed as to my final dismissal from the Excise; I am still in the service. Indeed, but for the exertions of a gentleman who must be known to you, Mr Graham of Fintry—a gentleman who has ever been my warm and generous friend—I had, without so much as a hearing, or the slightest previous intimation, been turned adrift with my helpless family to all the horrors of want. Had I had any other resource, probably I might have saved them the trouble of a dismissal; but the little money I gained by my publication is, almost every guinea, embarked to save from ruin an only brother, who, though one of the worthiest, is by no means one of the most fortunate of men.

In my defence to their accusations I said, that whatever might be my sentiments of republics, ancient or modern, as to Britain I abjured the idea—that a CONSTITUTION which, in its original principles, experience had proved to be every way fitted for our happiness in society, it would be insanity to sacrifice to an untried visionary theory—that, in consideration of my being situated in a department, however humble, immediately in the hands of people in power, I had forborne taking any active part, either personally or as an author, in the present business of REFORM: but that, where I must declare my sentiments, I would say there existed a system of corruption between the executive power and the representative part of the legislature, which boded no good to our glorious CONSTITUTION, and which every patriotic Briton must wish to see amended. Some such sentiments as these I stated in a letter to my generous patron, Mr Graham, which he laid before the Board at large, where, it seems, my last remark gave great offence; and one of our supervisors-general, a Mr Corbet, was instructed to inquire on the spot, and to document me—that my business was to act, *not to think*; and that, whatever might be men or measures, it was for me to be *silent and obedient*.

Mr Corbet was likewise my steady friend; so between Mr Graham and him I have been partly forgiven: only I understand that all hopes of my getting officially forward are blasted.

Now, sir, to the business in which I would more immediately interest you. The partiality of my COUNTRYMEN has brought me forward as a man of genius, and has given me a character to support. In the POET I have avowed manly and independent sentiments, which I trust will be found in the MAN. Reasons of no less weight than the support of a wife and family, have pointed out as the eligible, and, situated as I was, the only eligible line of life for me, my present occupation. Still my honest fame is my dearest concern; and a thousand times have I trembled at the idea of those *degrading* epithets that malice or misrepresentation may affix to my name. I have often, in blasting anticipation, listened to some future hackney scribbler, with the heavy malice of savage stupidity, exulting in his hireling paragraphs—‘BURNS, notwithstanding the *fanfaronade* of independence to be found in his works, and after having been held forth to public view and to public estimation as a man of some genius, yet, quite destitute of resources within himself to support his

borrowed dignity, he dwindled into a paltry exciseman, and slunk out the rest of his insignificant existence in the meanest of pursuits, and among the vilest of mankind.

In your illustrious hands, sir, permit me to lodge my disavowal and defiance of these slanderous falsehoods: BURNS was a poor man from birth, and an exciseman by necessity; but—I will say it—the stinging of his honest worth no poverty could debase, and his independent British mind oppression might bend, but could not subdue. Have not I, to me, a more precious stake in my country's welfare than the richest dukedom in it? I have a large family of children, and the prospect of many more. I have three sons, who, I see already, have brought into the world souls ill qualified to inhabit the bodies of SLAVES. Can I look tamely on, and see any machination to wrest from them the birthright of my boys—the little independent BRITONS, in whose veins runs my own blood? No! I will not, should my heart's blood stream around my attempt to defend it!

Does any man tell me, that my full efforts can be of no service, and that it does not belong to my humble station to meddle with the concern of a nation?

I can tell him that it is on such individuals as I that a nation has to rest, both for the hand of support and the eye of intelligence. The uninformed MOB may swell a nation's bulk; and the titled, tinsel, courtly throng may be its feathered ornament; but the number of those who are elevated enough in life to reason and to reflect, yet low enough to keep clear of the venal contagion of a court—these are a nation's strength!

I know not how to apologise for the impertinent length of this epistle; but one small request I must ask of you farther—When you have honoured this letter with a perusal, please to commit it to the flames. BURNS, in whose behalf you have so generously interested yourself, I have here, in his native colours, drawn as he is; but should any of the people in whose hands is the very bread he eats, get the least knowledge of the picture, *it would ruin the poor BARD for ever.*

My poems having just come out in another edition, I beg leave to present you with a copy, as a small mark of that high esteem and ardent gratitude with which I have the honour to be, sir, your deeply indebted and ever-devoted humble servant, R. B.

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MR THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, April 1793.

I REJOICE to find, my dear sir, that ballad-making continues to be your hobby-horse. Great pity 'twould be were it otherwise. I hope you will amble it away for many a year, and 'witch the world with your horsemanship.

I know there are a good many lively songs of merit that I have not put down in the list sent you; but I have them all in my eye. *My Patie is a Lover gay*, though a little unequal, is a natural and very pleasing song, and I humbly think we ought not to displace or alter it, except the last stanza. . . . [Here followed a number of observations on the Scottish songs, and on the manner of adapting these to the music.]

## BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

April 1793.

I HAVE yours, my dear sir, this moment. I shall answer it and your former letter, in my desultory way of saying whatever comes uppermost.

The business of many of our tunes wanting at the beginning what fiddlers call a starting-note, is often a rub to us poor rhymers.

'There's braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,  
'That wander through the blooming heather,'

you may alter to

'Braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,  
'Ye wander,'<sup>1</sup> &c.

My song, *Here awa, there awa*, as amended by Mr Erskine, I entirely approve of, and return you.<sup>2</sup>

Give me leave to criticise your taste in the only thing in which it is, in my opinion, reprehensible. You know I ought to know something of my own trade. Of pathos, sentiment, and point you are a complete judge; but there is a quality more necessary than either in a song, and which is the very essence of a ballad—I mean simplicity: now, if I mistake not, this last feature you are a little apt to sacrifice to the foregoing.

Ramsay, as every other poet, has not been always equally happy in his pieces; still I cannot approve of taking such liberties with an author as Mr W[alker] proposes doing with *The Last Time I came o'er the Moor*. Let a poet, if he chooses, take up the idea of another, and work it into a piece of his own; but to mangle the works of the poor bard whose tuneful tongue is now mute for ever in the dark and narrow house—by Heaven, 'twould be sacrilege! I grant that Mr W[alker]'s version is an improvement; but I know Mr W[alker] well, and esteem him much; let him mend the song, as the Highlander mended his gun—he gave it a new stock, a new lock, and a new barrel.

I do not by this object to leaving out improper stanzas, where

<sup>1</sup> In manuscript, 'Rove among the blooming heather.' Mr Thomson had subsequently adopted, 'Ye wander.'

<sup>2</sup> The reader has already seen that Burns did not finally adopt all of Mr Erskine's alterations.—CURRIE.



that can be done without spoiling the whole. One stanza in *The Lass o' Patie's Mill* must be left out: the song will be nothing worse for it. I am not sure if we can take the same liberty with *Corn-rigs are Bonnie*. Perhaps it might want the last stanza, and be the better for it. *Cauld Kail in Aberdeen* you must leave with me yet awhile. I have vowed to have a song to that air on the lady whom I attempted to celebrate in the verses *Puirtith Cauld and Restless Love*. At anyrate, my other song, *Green grow the Rashes*, will never suit. That song is current in Scotland under the old title, and to the merry old tune of that name, which of course would mar the progress of your song to celebrity. Your book will be the standard of Scots songs for the future: let this idea ever keep your judgment on the alarm.

I send a song on a celebrated toast in this country to suit *Bonnie Dundee*. I send you also a ballad to *The Mill, Mill O!*<sup>1</sup>

*The last Time I came o'er the Moor* I would fain attempt to make a Scots song for, and let Ramsay's be the English set. You shall hear from me soon. When you go to London on this business can you come by Dumfries? I have still several MS. Scots airs by me, which I have picked up mostly from the singing of country lasses. They please me vastly; but your learned *lugs*<sup>2</sup> would perhaps be displeased with the very feature for which I like them. I call them simple; you would pronounce them silly. Do you know a fine air called *Jackie Hume's Lament*? I have a song of considerable merit to that air. I'll enclose you both the song and tune, as I had them ready to send to *Johnson's Museum*.<sup>3</sup> I send you likewise, to me, a beautiful little air, which I had taken down from *viva voce*.<sup>4</sup> Adieu.

#### BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

April 1793.

The last time I came o'er the moor,  
And left Maria's dwelling,  
What throes, what tortures passing cure,  
Were in my bosom swelling:  
Condemned to see my rival's reign,  
While I in secret languish;  
To feel a fire in every vein,  
Yet dare not speak my anguish.

<sup>1</sup> The song to the tune of *Bonnie Dundee* is that named *Jessie*. The ballad to *The Mill, Mill O!* is that beginning 'When wild war's deadly blast was blawn.'—CURRIE.

<sup>2</sup> Ears.

<sup>3</sup> The song here mentioned is that given in a preceding letter, *O ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has gotten?* This song is surely Mr Burns's own writing, though he does not generally praise his own songs so much.—*Note by Mr Thomson*.

<sup>4</sup> The air here mentioned is that for which he wrote the ballad of *Bonnie Jean*.—CURRIE.

Love's veriest wretch, despairing, I  
 Fain, fain my crime would cover :  
 The unweeting groan, the bursting sigh,  
 Betray the guilty lover.  
 I know my doom must be despair,  
 Thou wilt nor canst relieve me ;  
 But, O Maria, hear my prayer,  
 For pity's sake, forgive me !  
 The music of thy tongue I heard,  
 Nor wist while it enslaved me ;  
 I saw thine eyes, yet nothing feared,  
 Till fears no more had saved me.  
 The unwary sailor thus aghast  
 The wheeling torrent viewing,  
 In circling horrors yields at last  
 In overwhelming ruin !

MY DEAR SIR—I had scarcely put my last letter into the post-office when I took up the subject of *The Last Time I came o'er the Moor*, and ere I slept drew the outlines of the foregoing. How far I have succeeded I leave on this, as on every other occasion, to you to decide. I own my vanity is flattered when you give my songs a place in your elegant and superb work ; but to be of service to the work is my first wish. As I have often told you, I do not in a single instance wish you, out of compliment to me, to insert anything of mine. One hint let me give you—whatever Mr Pleyel does, let him not alter one iota of the original Scottish airs—I mean in the song department—but let our national music preserve its native features. They are, I own, frequently wild and irreducible to the more modern rules ; but on that very eccentricity, perhaps, depends a great part of their effect.

The sentiments expressed in the song which the poet transcribed in the above letter are not pleasing. They hint at a discreditable passion, in which no pure mind could possibly sympathise ; therefore they must be held as unfitted for song. It can scarcely be doubted that they were suggested by some roving sensations of the bard towards the too-witching Mrs Riddel, though that these bore no great proportion to the mere *métier* of the artist aiming at a certain literary effect is equally probable. It will be found that Burns afterwards made considerable alterations in the song.

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MR THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 26th April 1788.

I HEARTILY thank you, my dear sir, for your last two letters, and the songs which accompanied them. I am always both instructed

and entertained by your observations, and the frankness with which you speak out your mind is to me highly agreeable. It is very possible I may not have the true idea of simplicity in composition. I confess there are several songs, of Allan Ramsay's for example, that I think silly enough, which another person, more conversant than I have been with country people, would perhaps call simple and natural. But the lowest scenes of simple nature will not please generally, if copied precisely as they are. The poet, like the painter, must select what will form an agreeable, as well as a natural picture.<sup>1</sup> On this subject it were easy to enlarge; but at present suffice it to say, that I consider simplicity, rightly understood, as a most essential quality in composition, and the groundwork of beauty in all the arts. I will gladly appropriate your most interesting new ballad, 'When wild war's deadly blast,' &c. to *The Mill, Mill O!* as well as the two other songs to their respective airs; but the third and fourth lines of the first verse must undergo some little alteration in order to suit the music. Playel does not alter a single note of the songs. That would be absurd indeed! With the airs which he introduces into the sonatas, I allow him to take such liberties as he pleases; but that has nothing to do with the songs.

P.S.—I wish you would do as you proposed with your *Rigs of Barley*. If the loose sentiments are thrashed out of it, I will find an air for it; but as to this there is no hurry.

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TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE, ST JAMES'S STREET, EDINBURGH.

April 26, 1793.<sup>2</sup>

I AM——out of humour, my dear Ainslie, and that is the reason why I take up the pen to you: 'tis the nearest way (*probatum est*) to recover my spirits again.

I received your last, and was much entertained with it; but I will not at this time, nor at any other time, answer it. Answer a letter!—I never could answer a letter in my life. I have written many a letter in return for letters I have received; but then—they were original matter—spurt-away! zig here, zag there; as if the devil, that my grannie (an old woman *indeed!*) often told me, rode on Will-o'-wisp, or, in her more classic phrase, SPUNKIE, were looking over my elbow. A happy thought that idea has engendered in my head! SPUNKIE, thou shalt henceforth be my Symbol, Signature, and Tutelary Genius! Like thee, hap-step-and-loup, here-awa-there-awa, higglety-pigglety, pell-mell, hither-and-yont, ram-stam, happy-go-lucky, up tails-a'-by-the-light-o'-the-moon—has been, is, and shall be, my progress through the mosses and moors of this vile, bleak, barren wilderness of a life of ours.

Come, then, my guardian spirit! like thee, may I skip away, amus-

<sup>1</sup> The orthodox doctrine as against the Wordsworthian heresy.

<sup>2</sup> So indorsed by Mr Ainslie.

ing myself by and at my own light; and if any opaque-souled lubber of mankind complain that my elfine, lambent, glimmerous wanderings have misled his stupid steps over precipices or into bogs, let the thick-headed blunderbuss recollect that he is not SPUNKIE:—that

'SPUNKIE's wanderings could not copied be;  
Amid these perils none durst walk but he.'

I feel vastly better. I give you joy. . . . I have no doubt but scholarcraft may be caught, as a Scotchman catches the itch, by friction. How else can you account for it, that born blockheads, by mere dint of *handling* books, grow so wise that even they themselves are equally convinced of and surprised at their own parts! I once carried this philosophy to that degree, that in a knot of country folks who had a library amongst them, and who, to the honour of their good sense, made me factotum in the business; one of our members, a little, wise-looking, squat, upright, jabbering body of a tailor, I advised him, instead of turning over the leaves, to *bind the book on his back*. Johnnie took the hint, and as our meetings were every fourth Saturday, and Pricklouse having a good Scots mile to walk in coming, and of course another in returning, Bodkin was sure to lay his hand on some heavy quarto or ponderous folio, with, and under which, wrapt up in his gray plaid, he grew wise as he grew weary, all the way home. He carried this so far, that an old musty Hebrew concordance, which we had in a present<sup>1</sup> from a neighbouring priest, by mere dint of applying it, as doctors do a blistering plaster, between his shoulders, Stitch in a dozen pilgrimages acquired as much *rational* theology as the said priest had done by forty years' perusal of the pages.

Tell me, and tell me truly, what you think of this theory.  
Yours, SPUNKIE.

Although it cannot be said of Burns and Jean, as of Dr Primrose and his worthy partner, that 'all their adventures were by the fireside, and all their migrations from the blue bed to the brown,' there nevertheless does attach to such domestic particulars in their case a certain importance, proportioned to the difficulty which is experienced in obtaining a clear and authentic view of the life of the great poet. It becomes tolerably certain, from the removal which they effected at Whitsunday 1793,<sup>2</sup> from their little floor of a house in the Wee Vennel to a small detached or independent dwelling in the Mill-hole Brae or Mill Vennel, that they felt themselves at that time in circumstances to justify an enlargement of expense for the sake of greater comfort. It would be only an advance from a £6 or £7 rent to one of £10 or £12; yet this, in their humble circumstances, was a considerable improve-

<sup>1</sup> In a present—Scotticism for *as a present*.

<sup>2</sup> Allan Cunningham places this event at Midsummer 1794, a time of gloom to Burns. The above is ascertained as the true date by an account for a grate furnished to the new dwelling by George Haugh, blacksmith, amounting, with the fender and other articles, to £1, 7s. 4d.

ment, and one betokening cheerful views of the future. Their new house was a neat one of two floors; containing kitchen, parlour, one or two good bedrooms, together with several lesser apartments, useful for the accommodation of a young family. It is just possible that by the time the house came to be occupied, the cheerful views under which it had been taken were somewhat overcast, for the first few months of the war had intervened, producing a general difficulty throughout the nation. Burns contemplated the downward progress of his country at that time with feelings of keen indignation, which would occasionally escape in communications to his more intimate friends:

TO MR PETER HILL.

[DUMFRIES, May 1793?]

I HOPE and trust that this unlucky blast which has overturned so many, and many worthy characters, who four months ago little dreaded any such thing—will spare my friend.

O may the wrath and curse of all mankind haunt and harass these turbulent, unprincipled miscreants who have involved a People in this ruinous business!

I have not a moment more. Blessed be he that bleaseth thee, and cursed be he that curseth thee, and the wretch whose envious malice would injure thee; may the Giver of every good and perfect gift say unto him, 'Thou shalt not prosper!' R. B

BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

June 1793.

WHEN I tell you, my dear sir, that a friend of mine, in whom I am much interested, has fallen a sacrifice to these accursed times, you will easily allow that it might unhinge me for doing any good among ballads. My own loss, as to pecuniary matters, is trifling; but the total ruin of a much-loved friend is a loss indeed. Pardon my seeming inattention to your last commands.

I cannot alter the disputed lines in *The Mill, Mill O!*<sup>1</sup> What you

<sup>1</sup> The lines were the third and fourth:—

'Wi' mony a sweet babe fatherless,  
And mony a widow mourning.'

As our poet had maintained a long silence, and the first number of Mr Thomson's musical work was in the press, this gentleman ventured, by Mr Erskine's advice; to substitute for them in that publication—

'And eyes again with pleasure beamed  
That had been bleared with mourning.'

Though better suited to the music, these lines are inferior to the original. This is the only alteration adopted by Mr Thomson which Burns did not approve, or at least assent to.—CURRIE.

think a defect, I esteem as a positive beauty; so you see how doctors differ. I shall now, with as much alacrity as I can muster, go on with your commands.

You know Fraser, the hautboy-player in Edinburgh—he is here instructing a band of music for a fencible corps quartered in this county. Among many of his airs that please me, there is one, well known as a reel, by the name of *The Quaker's Wife*; and which, I remember, a grand-aunt of mine used to sing by the name of *Liggeram Cosh*, my *Bonnie Wee Lass*. Mr Fraser plays it slow, and with an expression that quite charms me. I became such an enthusiast about it, that I made a song for it, which I here subjoin, and enclose Fraser's set of the tune. If they hit your fancy, they are at your service; if not, return me the tune, and I will put it in *Johnson's Museum*. I think the song is not in my worst manner.

## BLITHE HAE I BEEN ON YON HILL.

TUNE—*Liggeram Cosh*.

Blithe hae I been on yon hill,  
 As the lambs befere me;  
 Careless ilka thought and free,  
 As the breeze flew o'er me:  
 Now nae longer sport and play,  
 Mirth or sang can please me;  
 Lesley is sae fair and coy,  
 Care and anguish seize me.

Heavy, heavy is the task,  
 Hopeless love declaring;  
 Trembling, I dow nocht but glower,  
 Sighing, dumb, despairing!  
 If she winna ease the thraws  
 In my bosom swelling,  
 Underneath the grass-green sod,  
 Soon maun be my dwelling.

I should wish to hear how this pleases you.

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BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

25th June 1793.

HAVE you ever, my dear sir, felt your bosom ready to burst with indignation, on reading of those mighty villains who divide kingdom against kingdom, desolate provinces, and lay nations waste, out of the wantonness of ambition, or often from still more ignoble passions! In a mood of this kind to-day I recollected the air of

*Logan Water*, and it occurred to me that its querulous melody probably had its origin from the plaintive indignation of some swelling, suffering heart, fired at the tyrannic strides of some public destroyer, and overwhelmed with private distress, the consequence of a country's ruin. If I have done anything at all like justice to my feelings, the following song, composed in three-quarters of an hour's meditation in my elbow-chair, ought to have some merit :—

## LOGAN BRAES.

TUNE—*Logan Water*.<sup>1</sup>

O Logan, sweetly didst thou glide  
That day I was my Willie's bride !  
And years sinsyne hae o'er us run,  
Like Logan to the simmer sun.  
But now thy flowery banks appear  
Like drumlie winter, dark and drear,  
While my dear lad maun face his faes,  
Far, far frae me and Logan braes.

Again the merry month o' May  
Has made our hills and valleys gay ;  
The birds rejoice in leafy bowers,  
The bees hum round the breathing flowers :  
Blithe morning lifts his rosy eye,  
And evening's tears are tears of joy :  
My soul, delightless, a' surveys,  
While Willie's far frae Logan braes.

Within yon milk-white hawthorn bush,  
Amang her nestlings sits the thrush ;  
Her faithfu' mate will share her toil,  
Or wi' his songs her cares beguile :  
But I wi' my sweet nurslings here,  
Nae mate to help, nae mate to cheer,  
Pass widowed nights and joyless days,  
While Willie's far frae Logan braes.

<sup>1</sup> The air of *Logan Water* is old, and there are several old songs to it. Immediately before the rise of Burns, Mr John Mayne, who afterwards became known for a poem entitled the *Siller Gun*, wrote a very agreeable song to the air, beginning,

' By Logan's streams, that rin sae deep.'

It was published in the *Star* newspaper, May 23, 1799. Burns, having heard that song, and supposing it to be an old composition, adopted into the above a couplet from it, which he admired—

' While my dear lad maun face his faes,  
Far, far frae me and Logan braes.'

Mr Mayne lived to a good old age, and died, March 14, 1836, at Lisson Grove, near London.

O wae upon you, men o' state,  
 That brethren rouse to deadly hate !  
 As ye make many a fond heart mourn,  
 Sae may it on your heads return !  
 How can your flinty hearts enjoy  
 The widow's tear, the orphan's cry ?<sup>1</sup>  
 But soon may peace bring happy days,  
 And Willie hame to Logan braes !

Do you know the following beautiful little fragment, in Witherspoon's collection of Scots songs ?

AIR—*Hughie Graham.*

O gin my love were yon red rose,  
 That grows upon the castle wa';  
 And I mysel' a drap o' dew,  
 Into her bonnie breast to fa' !

O there, beyond expression blest,  
 I'd feast on beauty a' the night ;  
 Sealed on her silk-soft faulds to rest,  
 Till fleyed awa by Phoebus' light !

This thought is inexpressibly beautiful, and quite, so far as I know, original. It is too short for a song, else I would forswear you altogether, unless you gave it a place. I have often tried to eke a stanza to it, but in vain. After balancing myself for a musing five minutes, on the hind-legs of my elbow-chair, I produced the following.

The verses are far inferior to the foregoing, I frankly confess ; but if worthy of insertion at all, they might be first in place, as every poet who knows anything of his trade will husband his best thoughts for a concluding stroke.

O were my love yon lilac fair,  
 Wi' purple blossoms to the spring ;  
 And I, a bird to shelter there,  
 When wearied on my little wing !

How I wad mourn, when it was torn  
 By autumn wild, and winter rude !  
 But I wad sing on wanton wing  
 When youthfu' May its bloom renewed.

<sup>1</sup> Originally,

'Ye mind na, 'mid your cruel joys,  
 The widow's tears, the orphan's cries.'



## MR THOMSON TO BURNS.

Monday, 1st July 1793.

I AM extremely sorry, my good sir, that anything should happen to unhinge you. The times are terribly out of tune, and when harmony will be restored, Heaven knows.

The first book of songs, just published, will be despatched to you along with this. Let me be favoured with your opinion of it, frankly and freely.

I shall certainly give a place to the song you have written for the *Quaker's Wife*; it is quite enchanting. Pray, will you return the list of songs, with such airs added to it as you think ought to be included? The business now rests entirely on myself, the gentlemen who originally agreed to join the speculation having requested to be off. No matter, a loser I cannot be. The superior excellence of the work will create a general demand for it as soon as it is properly known; and were the sale even slower than it promises to be, I should be somewhat compensated for my labour by the pleasure I shall receive from the music. I cannot express how much I am obliged to you for the exquisite new songs you are sending me; but thanks, my friend, are a poor return for what you have done—as I shall be benefited by the publication, you must suffer me to enclose a small mark of my gratitude,<sup>1</sup> and to repeat it afterwards when I find it convenient. Do not return it, for, by Heaven! if you do, our correspondence is at an end; and though this would be no loss to you, it would mar the publication, which, under your auspices, cannot fail to be respectable and interesting.

Wednesday morning.

I thank you for your delicate additional verses to the old fragment, and for your excellent song to *Logan Water*—Thomson's truly elegant one will follow for the English singer. Your apostrophe to statesmen is admirable, but I am not sure if it is quite suitable to the supposed gentle character of the fair mourner who speaks it.

## BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

2d July 1793.

MY DEAR SIR—I have just finished the following ballad, and, as I do think it in my best style, I send it you. Mr Clarke, who wrote down the air from Mrs Burns's wood-note wild, is very fond of it, and has given it a celebrity by teaching it to some young ladies of the first fashion here. If you do not like the air enough to give it a

<sup>1</sup> Five pounds.

place in your collection, please return it. The song you may keep, as I remember it.

## BONNIE JEAN.

There was an lass, and she was fair,  
At kirk and market to be seen;  
When a' the fairest maids were met,  
The fairest maid was bonnie Jean.

And aye she wrought her mammie's wark,  
And aye she sang sae merrilie:  
The blithest bird upon the bush  
Had ne'er a lighter heart than she.

But hawks will rob the tender joys  
That bless the little lintwhite's nest;  
And frost will blight the fairest flowers,  
And love will break the soundest rest.

Young Robie was the brawest lad,  
The flower and pride of a' the glen;  
And he had owsen, sheep, and kye,  
And wanton naigies nine or ten.

He gaed wi' Jeanie to the tryste,  
He danced wi' Jeanie on the down;  
And lang ere witless Jeanie wist,  
Her heart was tint, her peace was stown.

As in the bosom o' the stream  
The moonbeam dwells at dewy e'en,  
So trembling, pure, was tender love  
Within the breast o' bonnie Jean.<sup>1</sup>

And now she works her mammie's wark,  
And aye she sighs wi' care and pain;  
Yet wist na what her ail might be,  
Or what wad mak her weel again.

But did na Jeanie's heart loup light,  
And did na joy blink in her ee,  
As Robie tauld a tale o' love  
Ae e'enin on the lily lea?

<sup>1</sup> In the original manuscript, our poet asks Mr Thomson if this stanza is not original.—CURRIE.

The sun was sinking in the west,  
 The birds sang sweet in ilka grove ;  
 His cheek to hers he fondly prest,  
 And whispered thus his tale o' love :

'O Jeanie fair, I loe thee dear ;  
 O canst thou think to fancy me ;  
 Or wilt thou leave thy mammie's cot,  
 And learn to tent the farms wi' me !

'At barn or byre thou shalt na drudge,  
 Or naething else to trouble thee ;  
 But stray amang the heather-bells,  
 And tent the waving corn wi' me.'

Now what could artless Jeanie do ?  
 She had nae will to say him na ;  
 At length she blushed a sweet consent,  
 And love was aye between them twa.

I have some thoughts of inserting in your index, or in my notes, the names of the fair ones, the themes of my songs. I do not mean the name at full, but dashes or asterisms, so as ingenuity may find them out.

The heroine of the foregoing is Miss Macmurdo, daughter to Mr. Macmurdo of Drumlairig, one of your subscribers. I have not painted her in the rank which she holds in life, but in the dress and character of a cottager.<sup>1</sup>

Mr Macmurdo at this time resided at or in the immediate neighbourhood of Dumfries. Mr Clarke acted as music-master to his daughters.

#### BURNS TO MR THOMSON.

July 1793.

I ASSURE you, my dear sir, that you truly hurt me with your pecuniary parcel. It degrades me in my own eyes. However, to return it would savour of affectation ; but, as to any more traffic of that debtor and creditor kind, I swear, by that HONOUR which crowns the upright statue of ROBERT BURNS'S INTEGRITY—on the least motion of it, I will indignantly spurn the bypast transaction, and from that moment commence entire stranger to you ! BURNS'S character for generosity of sentiment and independence of mind will, I trust, long outlive any of his wants which the cold, unfeeling ore can supply ; at least I will take care that such a character he shall deserve.

<sup>1</sup> This sentence does not appear in the original letter.

Thank you for my copy of your publication.. Never did my eyes behold in any musical work such elegance and correctness. Your preface, too, is admirably written, only your partiality to me has made you say too much: however, it will bind me down to double every effort in the future progress of the work. The following are a few remarks on the songs in the list you sent me. I never copy what I write to you, so I may be often tautological, or perhaps contradictory.

*The Flowers o' the Forest* is charming as a poem, and should be, and must be, set to the notes; but, though out of your rule, the three stanzas beginning,

'I hae seen the smiling e' fortune beguiling,'

are worthy of a place, were it but to immortalise the author of them, who is an old lady of my acquaintance, and at this moment living in Edinburgh. She is a Mrs Cockburn, I forget of what place, but from Roxburghshire.<sup>1</sup> What a charming apostrophe is

'O fickle fortune, why this cruel sporting,  
Why, why torment us, poor sons of a day!'

The old ballad, *I wish I were where Helen lies*, is silly, to contemptibility. My alteration of it, in *Johnson*, is not much better. Mr Pinkerton, in his, what he calls, ancient ballads—many of them notorious, though beautiful enough, forgeries—has the best set. It is full of his own interpolations—but no matter.

In my next I will suggest to your consideration a few songs which may have escaped your hurried notice. In the meantime allow me to congratulate you now, as a brother of the quill. You have committed your character and fame, which will now be tried, for ages to come, by the illustrious jury of the SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF TASTE—all whom poesy can please, or music charm.

Being a bard of nature, I have some pretensions to second-sight; and I am warranted by the spirit to foretell and affirm, that your great-grandchild will hold up your volumes, and say, with honest pride, 'This so-much-admired selection was the work of my ancestor!'<sup>2</sup>

In a postscript, Burns mentions a few gentlemen of his acquaintance who had become subscribers for the *Melodies*, no doubt at his own intercession. He adds—'all your subscribers here are determined to transmit you the full price, without the intervention of those harpies the booksellers.'<sup>3</sup> This will be smiled at, I trust, by gods, men, and booksellers, all alike; but it at least shews the

<sup>1</sup> Alison Rutherford of Fernellee, in Selkirkshire, by marriage Mrs Patrick Cockburn. She died in 1794, at an advanced age.

<sup>2</sup> The children of the far-renowned Charles Dickens are the great-grandchildren of Mr Thomson. It may be hoped that some one of them will have such a feeling for Scottish music, and for their ancestor's meritorious labours, as to realise the prediction of Burns.

<sup>3</sup> Original manuscript.

great good-will of Burns towards Mr Thomson, and his anxiety to see his undertaking prove remunerative.

The strong, almost fierce, determination of Burns to accept no pecuniary recompense from Mr Thomson has excited much surprise. It has been remarked by Mr Lockhart as the more wonderful, in as far as the poet felt no scruple in accepting hundreds of pounds from Mr Creech as the profits of his volume of poems. The biographer might have added that Burns even condescended to undertake journeys for the purpose of collecting the moneys received by friends in particular districts for the subscribers' copies of his poems. The fact is, our bard deemed an author fully entitled to any reward which might arise from his works published in the ordinary manner. He himself says in a letter to Mr Carfrae, dated 1789: 'The profits of the labours of a man of genius are, I hope, as honourable as any profits whatever.' And on this principle he acted as far as ordinary modes of publishing were concerned. Yet he appears to have had at the same time an insuperable aversion to deliberately writing for money.<sup>1</sup> And this he applied in the cases of Messrs Johnson and Thomson. He had, besides, a peculiar feeling about these men, regarding them as amateurs of Scottish music and song like himself, who were taking trouble and undergoing risk for the honour and glory of a cause interesting to all true-hearted Scotsmen. In such a business, he must act for love, if he was to act at all. It might, one would think, have occurred to him that Messrs Johnson and Thomson were in the way of possibly making some profit by their respective publications. All that can be said on the other hand is, that amateurship was truly the basis of both publications, that Johnson's had not proved a source of profit, and that Mr Thomson's turning out differently was highly problematical. Burns accordingly beheld these men as honest enthusiasts, whom it would be a pleasure to assist, but from whom it would be ungenerous to accept of pecuniary *honoraria* in respect of any help which his muse might render them. Such delicacy would not now be felt by many English poets; but, whatever may be thought of their principles of action, we must at least admit that the Scottish bard was animated by a sentiment highly

<sup>1</sup> In a brief anonymous memoir of Burns, published in the *Scotts Magazine* for January 1797, and which appears to have been the composition of one who knew him and had visited him at Ellisland, it is stated that he considered it below him to be an author by profession. 'A friend,' adds the writer, 'knowing his family to be in great want [an exaggeration, certainly], urged the propriety, and even necessity, of publishing a few poems, assuring him of their success, and shewing the advantage that would accrue to his family from it. His answer was: "No; if a friend desires me, and if I'm in the mood for it, I'll write a poem, but I'll be d— if ever I write for money."'

This writer, like Mr Robert Ainslie, seems to have thought the household of Burns at Ellisland deficient in the neatness which might have been expected.

honourable to him, and in entire keeping with the general strain of his character. In judging of the degree of self-denial exerted by Burns in forbidding future remittances of money from Mr Thomson it is necessary to know how his pecuniary circumstances actually stood at this time. It will be afterwards shewn that his poverty, as a general fact, has been exaggerated; yet I believe that in July 1793, when Burns spoke so firmly to Mr Thomson, a few pounds would have been of essential service to him. It will be readily admitted that the spirit of Burns was one which never could be comfortable under the burden of debt, and that he would therefore be anxious to clear himself of that encumbrance, even in its pettiest forms, when in his power. Yet there is evidence that the trifle (10s.) due to Jackson of the *Dumfries Journal* newspaper for advertising the sale of his stock at Ellisland, was now, after twenty months, still unpaid. It was discharged on the 12th of the month mentioned, probably out of the very money transmitted by Mr Thomson.<sup>1</sup> There is further reason for believing, that it was at this time that he addressed to some unknown patron a note, of which a fragment without date or superscription has alone been preserved, containing the following distressing lines: 'This is a painful, disagreeable letter, and the first of the kind I ever wrote. *I am truly in serious distress for three or four guineas*; can you, my dear sir, accommodate me? These accursed times, by tripping up importation, have for this year at least lopped off a full third of my income; and with my large family, this to me is a distressing matter.' Strange that he would rather humble himself to be a borrower than accept of money from a man willing to give it to him as a payment of honourable service. One might have at least expected that, if he was to be a borrower at all, he would have deemed Mr Thomson entitled or called upon to be the lender. Yet no—this would have in some degree perilled 'the uprightness of the statue of ROBERT BURNS'S INTEGRITY.' His seems to have been a nature which recoils the more from dubiously-acquired money the more pressingly it is needed.

<sup>1</sup> The account is in possession of Mr Robert Cole.

























